AM 1954
ke
c.1

Boston University
College of Liberal Arts
Library

THE GIFT OF the Author

378.744
BO
AM 1934
Re
c.1

52081

BOSTON UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL

Thesis

JOHN WESLEY'S DOCTRINE OF THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT

by
Dorothy Leah Kelley
(A.B.,Olivet College, 1934)

submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
1934.

52081

OUTLINE OF THESIS

JOHN WESLEY'S DOCTRINE OF THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT.

Chapter I. Introduction. 1
1. Problem Stated
2. Method of Treatment
(1) Historical Development
(2) Sources of his Theory
(3) Analysis of Wesley's Views on the Witness of the Spirit.
3. Importance of the Study
(1) Wesleyan Theology revolves around this doctrine.

Chapter II. The Sources of Wesley's Doctrine 15
1. Indirect Sources.
(1) Calvin
(2) Luther
(3) Westminister Confession (1648)
2. Direct Sources.
(1) Arminius
(2) Wm. Law's Treatise on "Christian Perfection"
(3) Quaker Influence
(4) Moravian Influence
(5) Witness of the Spirit in his own Experience.

Chapter III. History of the Doctrine of Assurance 42
1. The Doctrine of Assurance and Wesley's Doctrine of the Witness of the Spirit
(1) Luther's Doctrine
(2) Calvin's Doctrine of present and future Assurance.
(3) Religious certainty of the Quakers.
(4) Wesley's Doctrine became a working Creed.

Chapter IV. The Analysis of Wesley's Doctrine 63
1. Distinction between Justifying Faith and the Witness of the Spirit.
2. Calvinistic Doctrine
3. Wesley's Definition.
4. Assurance of Salvation a joint witness- Holy Spirit and Human Spirit.
5. Necessity and Possibility of the Witness of the Spirit.
6. The Direct Witness of the Holy Spirit
7. The relationship of the direct and indirect witness of the Spirit.
8. Witness of the Human Spirit.
9. The Sum of Wesley's Doctrine of the Witness of the Spirit.
10. The meaning of the Doctrine for Wesleyan Theology.

Data Used 122
Bibliography 125



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2013

http://archive.org/details/johnwesleysdoctr00kell

JOHN WESLEY'S DOCTRINE OF THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT

Chapter One. Introduction

I. The Problem Stated.

The problem of this study is John Wesley's doctrine of the witness of the Spirit. To clarify the term we must add the thought of the witness of the Spirit to the adoption of the Christian into the family of God. But Wesley in his sermons and other written works usually states this as "the witness of the Spirit" and in whatever context it is found there is no misunderstanding of the meaning of these words. To Wesley this doctrine, as we shall show, was fundamental. It was the crux of one's relation to God as redeemed from sin. Where such witness did not exist Wesley would be slow in believing that such person had been forgiven his sins and adopted into the kingdom of God. This witness furnished the unmistakable knowledge that one was saved. In the Wesleyan thought there could be no doubting one's status in relation to God. To have the witness of the Spirit was to know beyond the shadow of a question that one's "sins were covered by the blood" as Wesley would express it.

This problem then is related to the general field of assurance of salvation. Through the Christian centuries some type of the doctrine of assurance has been maintained. Previous to the Reformation the possibility of a definite knowledge of personal assurance was usually doubted. Luther held that through an illumination of the Bible by the Spirit one could be certain of his standing before God. Calvin made assurance involve the idea of final salvation or election, and not immediate redemption. The Quakers and others of the Pietistic movement taught that assurance was the result of the "inner light" or personal illumination. But to Wesley this assurance of adoption as a child of God came as a direct witness of the Holy Spirit to the heart of the individual. Hence we see that Wesley's doctrine of the witness of the Spirit is a part of the problem of assurance of salvation.

1. But at the outset a delimitation must be made. Our study does not include the general field of assurance of salvation. Only in discovering the background of Wesley's doctrine of the witness of the Spirit are we interested in this broader field. Wesley's type of assurance is sufficiently distinctive in its nature to warrant

such a study. It is not the dogma of the Catholic church previous to the Reformation. Nor, as we shall see in a following statement, did Luther hold it. Calvin's interest was in the eternal security of the believer and not in the immediate hope of an unfailing knowledge of assurance of election. The "inner light" of the Quakers consists more in an illumination of the soul than in a witness of the Spirit. While roots of the Wesley's theory are found among the Moravians, still among them it is the germ and not the final development of the doctrine that we find.

2. A second delimitation must be made. Our interest lies not in the final development of the doctrine as held by Wesleyan theologians from the time of the death of the founder of Methodism, but rather in the doctrine as stated by Wesley himself. It is not a study of the evolution of the Methodist doctrine of the witness of the Spirit, but of the theory as affirmed by Wesley. While the general view of Wesley has been avowed to be true by all Methodist theologians, still each one diverges by degrees from the original statement either by way of substraction of essential elements or the addition of points not found in Wesley's doctrine. Our primal aim is a study of Wesley's doctrine as found in his works.

II. Method of Treatment

1. In the method of procedure we shall first approach our problem of Wesley's doctrine by presenting the historical develooment of the doctrine. Herein we briefly outline five other types of the doctrine of assurance of salvation pointing out the lines of demarkation between each. Into this scheme we fit the theory of Wesley, showing wherein he differs from the others. These forms are: The doctrine of the Catholic church; the Lutheran doctrine of subjective and objective assurance; Calvin's doctrine of present and future certainty; and the "inner light" theory of the Quakers. This procedure is necessary in that it outlines Wesley's position in the broad theory of assurance, and clearly defines his differentiations from each of these.

2. We then proceed to point out the position which the witness of the Spirit occupies among these types of assurance. As noted above it is necessary to recognize at the outset that the doctrine of the witness of the Spirit cannot be classified as any of the other five forms of the theories of personal assurance of salvation.

3. After the background for Wesley's views on assur-

ance has been laid, it is obvious that we must try to discover the sources of his theory. It may be after all that the dogma is not original with him, as such is the case, and that it has been borrowed from other writers. But in the clear-cut analysis of the source, while we do unearth seeds of his view, still Wesley made a distinct advance upon any source to which he was debtor.

The indirect sources from which he borrowed are: the rich heritage from the Reformers, and from the early Church; and the influence of the creedal statements. The more direct sources are: Arminius' doctrine of assurance: Law's "Christian Perfection", his father, and more especially his dying words; his relationship with the Quakers; the Moravians, especially through Peter Boehler, and Count Zinzendorf; and finally his type of conversion and the attendant witness of the Spirit, which he professed to experience.

4. Following this comes the body of the Thesis which is the analysis of Wesley's views on the witness of the Spirit. From eight different angles we analyze his teachings on this issue as discovered in his writings.

These are: 1. The distinction between justifying faith and the witness of the Spirit; 2. Calvinistic doctrine, according to Wesley, opposed to the witness of the Spirit; 3. the assurance of salvation a joint witness, consisting of both a divine and a human element; 4. the necessity and probability of the witness of the Spirit; 5. the nature of the direct witness of the Holy Spirit; 6. the relation of the direct and the indirect witnesses; 7. the nature of the witness of the human spirit; 8. and finally the nature of the joint testimony of the Divine Spirit and the human spirit.

5. In the conclusion of the study we shall endeavor to summarize the finding of the thesis, and from the same reach conclusions as to the nature of Wesley's doctrine of the witness of the Spirit.

III. The Importance of the Study.

1. This study is important because of the fact that it is the central doctrine of Wesley's theology. In every type of work which he wrote along religious lines we find this doctrine. It is the pivot around which Wesleyan theological thought was to revolve. Wesley himself felt that this doctrine of the witness of the

Spirit was a "grand part of the testimony" which God had raised up the Methodists to bear to mankind. He wrote, "It more nearly concerns the Methodists, so-called clearly to understand, explain and define this doctrine; because it is the one grand part of the testimony which God has given them to bear to mankind. It is his peculiar blessing upon them in searching the Scriptures, confirmed by the experience of His children, that this great evangelical truth has been recovered, which had been for many years well-nigh lost and forgotten."[1]

We discover the doctrine in the various forms of Wesley's writings. 1. In the early rules for Methodists it is contained. The following is taken from the "Rules of the Band of Societies," drawn up on December 25,1738. Under the heading of "Some of the Questions proposed to every one before he is admitted among us may be to this effect:

"1. Have you the forgiveness of your sins?

"2. Have you peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ?

"3. Have you the witness of God's Spirit with your Spirit that you are a child of God?"[2]

---

1. Sermon XI, p.93
2. Living Thoughts of John Wesley (by Potts), p.31.

These rules are signed by John and Charles Wesley.

2. In the paper termed "The Character of a Methodist" written in 1739, we find this description of a Methodist (under point 6), "He cannot but rejoice whenever he looks back on the state wherein he now is, 'being justified freely' and having 'peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ' For 'he that believeth hath the witness' of this 'in himself,' being now the son of God through faith... And 'the Spirit itself beareth witness with his spirit, that he is a child of God."[1]

3. In Wesley's"Principles of a Methodist" written about 1743, he outlines the development of his spiritual state, and of his doctrine. Under the heading, "Of the Assurance of Justification," he writes, "I believe that conversion. .. is an instantaneous work, and that the moment a man has living faith in Christ he is converted or justified: which faith he cannot have without knowing that he has it.

"I believe the moment a man is justified he has peace with God; which he cannot have without knowing that he has it."[2]

1.Ibid. pp.33-36
2.Works, Vol. III.p.91

On the same line as this elsewhere he writes, "I believe that a man is justified... at the same time that he is born of God... which deliverance from sin he cannot have without knowing that he has it."[1]

4. Not only in his various Rules and descriptions of the character of Methodists, but also in his sermons do we find this doctrine deeply imbedded. Of the volume of Sermons, which with his Notes, he declared contained his theology and that which was to be held by the Methodists, three sermons are devoted to this doctrine.[2] These are sermons Number X, "The Witness of the Spirit," XI, "The Witness of the Spirit," and XII, "The Witness of Our Own Spirit." In these fifty some sermons to no other subject is as much space devoted.

5. The doctrine is clearly contained in his Notes on the New Testament, though as much space is not devoted to it as is the case with his Sermons.

6. Again the doctrine is not overlooked in his Letters, for in one written to Mr. John Smith, July 10,1747, devoted throughout to the defense of the doc-

1.Living Thoughts from John Wesley, p.47
2.Sermons, Vol. I,pp.85-108.

trine, we read, "A man feels the testimony of God's Spirit, and cannot then deny or doubt his being a child of God".[1] In a letter to Mr. Richard Thomson, March 15, 1756, he said, "My belief in general is this: that every Christian believer has a divine conviction of his reconciliation with God."[2]

II. Not only is this the central doctrine of Wesley's theology, but it is his contribution to theological science. He added no other doctrine which is not to be found in the various beliefs of Christendom. His clarification of the theory of the witness of the Spirit entitles him to recognition as an original contributor to theological science. We think of Luther and justification by faith, of Calvin and the decrees of God, so must we also think of Wesley and the witness of the Spirit.

Writing of Wesley's appeal to experience as the final arbiter of one's religious status, Workman says, "Wesley's appeal to experience.... is known.... as the doctrine of Assurance. This is fundamental contribution of Methodism to the life and thought of the Church .... He proclaimed in no uncertain sound not only that

1. Living Thoughts from John Wesley, p.203
2. Ibid, 210.

a man may know his sins are forgiven, but that he has the witness within him."[1]

In Schaff's brilliant discussion of the development of the doctrines of Methodism , he says that they consist of three distinctive ones, which are: the universality of grace, the witness of the Spirit, and perfectionism. The first and third he traces to the Quakers as their views on "inner or universal light" and perfectionism. Concerning the second he writes, "The next distinctive doctrine of Methodism is the Witness of the Spirit, or assurance of Salvation (Rom. 8:15,16). It is a double and concurrent witness of God's Spirit and our spirit concerning our justification.... This testimony is immediate and direct, and follows the work of justification and regeneration. On the ground of this testimony the believer feels assured of his present acceptance with God and has a hope of his final salvation...."[2]

Recognizing the force of Wesley's contribution to theology, a recent Methodist theologian, Wilbur F. Tillett, of Vanderbilt University, writes it in his creed for world-wide Methodism. He affirms, "And (4) it is also the privilege of all believers to en-

1.Workman, A New History of Methodism. Vol.I,p.19
2.Schaff, Creeds of Christendom, Vol.I,p.899

joy the assurance of their salvation through the witness of the Spirit all through their Christian life."[1]

III. Finally this study is important in that the doctrine of the witness of the Spirit is the culmination of the Reformers' doctrine of assurance. As shall later be shown each of the outstanding reformers wrote into his creed the germs of this doctrine. Commenting upon the passage in Romans 8:16 both Luther and Calvin speak of a witness of the Spirit, but they are not so definite as Wesley. Tillett affirms, "Wesley took up where Luther left off, and preached with an emphasis hitherto unknown that, 'being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ;' and that there can be no peace with God without a conscious assurance of pardon."[2]

Luther's doctrine of subjective and objective assurance in Wesley becomes a direct and immediate witness of the Spirit. Calvin's view on the assurance of eternal election for Wesley is the conscious witness of the Holy Spirit that Just now the believer is certain of his adoption into the family of God. The "Inner Light" of the Quakers is more than a mere illumination

---

1. Tillett, A Statement of the Faith of World-wide Methodism, p.3
2. Tillett, Personal Salvation, p.275

of the mind or soul from which the Christian reasons that he is a child of God. For Wesley it is a definite testimony of the Holy Spirit and the human spirit that one is regenerated.

V. The Basis of Wesley's Theology.

Before proceeding further it is well to understand what Wesley considered the official standard of his theology. Quoting from Schaff, "When 81 years of age (Feb. 28,1784) Wesley, in his Deed of Declaration, called the Magna Charta of Methodism, bequeathed the property and government of his chapels in the United Kingdom, 358 in number, to the Legal Hundred, a conference of 100 preachers and their successors, on condition that they should accept as the basis of their doctrine his Notes on the New Testament, and the four volumes of Sermons which had been published by him or in his name 1746 - 1760 ~~in or before 1771~~. These sermons are ~~fifty-eight~~ 44 or perhaps but 43 in number, and convey the faith and duties of Christians, and carry the doctrines of the creed of Methodism."[1]

Hence we see that the official statement of Wesley's theology is to be found in these two sources. Since the Notes are but brief comments on the New Testament, we

1.Schaff, Creeds of Christendom. Vol. I. p.890
Also, L. Tymerman, The Oxford Methodists, Vol.III,pp.417ff

can expect his doctrines to be stated in his Sermons, which is the case. Wesley's preaching was very detailed and logical, and each sermon throughout the fifty-eight is either the affirmation or defense of some theological doctrine, or position. It would not be far amiss to affirm that the theology of John Wesley consists of these volumes of Sermons. The viewpoint cannot be taken that Wesley was not a theologian for these Sermons in their accuracy and biblical foundation, their logical arrangement and dogmatic content assure him a place among the theologians of Christendom. But as Luther, he was a practical rather than a systematic theologian. He found theology an aid in clarifying experience instead of a metaphysical practice. His experience, as was true with the leader of the Reformation, and not his philosophical acumen, dictated his theology.

Wesley's life as a churchman in furnishing the impetus and directing power in the organization of early Methodism, his activity as a writer on various lines, history, language, literature, poetry, etc., was so diversified that it overshadowed his work as a theologian.

Chapter Two. The Source of Wesley's Doctrine.

I. Indirect Sources

1. There are two possible indirect sources for Wesley's doctrine of the witness of the Spirit. His was a very rich heritage coming from the Reformers and the early church. In our discussion of the history of the doctrine of assurance we have seen that practically every type of this doctrine held to the thought of the Holy Spirit witnessing in one form or another with the soul or consciousness of the regenerated that he is a child of God. This is especially true with Luther's doctrine. He affirmed that the Spirit operates subjectively in the soul, whereby the Christian cries, "Abba Father." The same Spirit, by illuminating the Word of God, wrought within the consciousness of the child of God that calm persuasion that he had been adopted into the family of God. Calvin likewise taught the same. He held that the Spirit witnessed or testified with the human spirit of this adoption. His comments on Romans 8:15,16 could be no more exolicit.

Wesley lived in an age when this doctrine, so definitely reaffirmed by the Reformers, was the common her-

itage. The Reformers, through necessity, believed that one could have the testimony of the Spirit to the fact that he had been converted. Otherwise they could never be certain that by faith they had been justified as Luther taught. The difference became this: For them this doctrine was not the pivot around which all their theological conceptions revolved, while for Wesley it became the central idea of Christian experience as well as Christian dogma.

2. The second indirect source was the influence of the creedal statements in vogue in Wesley's time. Creeds are the crystallized thi king of the different churches and individuals. In the creeds of Wesley's age we find affirmations concerning assurance and the witness of the Holy Spirit.

(1) In the Confession Fidei Gallicana (French Confession of Faith), which was prepared by Calvin and his pupil De Chandieu, we find this doctrine in germ.

"XXI. We believe that we are enlightened in faith by the secret power of the Holy Spirit, that it is a gratuitous and special gift which God grants to whom

he will..."[1]

(2) As we should expect there are no references to assurance or the witness of the Spirit in the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England. But in the Lambeth Articles (1559), which as Schaff notes are a Calvinistic appendage to the Thirty-Nine Articles, we find a note with which Wesley was doubtlessly familiar.

"6. A man truly faithful, that is, such a one who is endued with a justifying faith, is certain with the full assurance of faith, of the remissions of his sins, and of his everlasting salvation."[2]

Herein we find the doctrine of assurance and faith combined and also the assurance of both present and future salvation. This final position Wesley denied.

(3) The Irish Articles of Religion (1615) are based on the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Lambeth Articles, and show the Calvinistic trend among the Irish churches. They lead up to the Westminister Confession.

"37. By justifying faith we understand not only the common belief of the articles of the Christian religion... but also a particular application of the

1. Schaff, op. cit., Vol. III, p.371
2. Schaff, op. cit., Vol. III, p.524

gracious promises of the gospel to the comfort of our own souls, whereby we lay hold on Christ... having an earnest trust and confidence in God... So that a true believer may be certain, by the assurance of faith, of the forgiveness of his sins, and of his everlasting salvation by Christ."[1]

(4) In the Five Arminian Articles (1610) no reference is made to the witness of the Spirit, nor to the doctrine of assurance. The reason for this may be that the doctrine of assurance was not a point of disagreement, and hence was left out.

(5) Articles IX, X, XI of the Canons of the Synod of Dort (1619) refer to the possibility of the assurance of salvation. Canon V mentions this not as a particular revelation, but as one coming from the faithfulness of the promise of God (which is Lutheran in effect). These are given for our consolation, "ex testimonio Spiritus Sancti testantis cum spiritu nostro nos esse Dei filios et hoeredes" (Rom. 8:16).

"Art. IX... True believers for themselves may and do obtain assurance according to the measure of their

1. Ibid, Vol. III, 533,4

faith, whereby they arrive at the certain persuasion that they ever will continue true and living members of the Church; and that they experience forgiveness of sins, and will at last inherit eternal life.

"X. This assurance, however, is not produced by any peculiar revelation contrary to, or independent of the word of God, but springs from faith in God's promise .... and from the testimony of the Holy Spirit witnessing with our spirit, that we are the children and heirs of God" (Rom. 8:16).[1]

In effect this is a combination of the Lutheran and the Calvinistic positions. But it gives the promise of Wesley's later doctrine of the witness of the Spirit.

(6) The Westminster Confession (1648) with which Wesley was doubtless familiar, bears the marks of the doctrine of the witness of the spirit.

This certainly is not a bare conjectural and probable persuasion, grounded upon a fallible hope, but an infallible assurance of faith, founded on (a) the divine truth of the promises, (b) the inward evidence of those graces to which the promises are made, and (c) the testimony of the Holy Spirit.

1. Ibid, Vol. III,p.594

"II. This certainly is.... an infallible assurance of faith, founded upon the truth of the promises of salvation, the inward evidence of those graces to which these promises are made, the testimony of the spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God (Rom. 8:15,16)...

"III. This infallible assurance doth not so belong to the essence of faith... yet being enabled by the Spirit to know the things which are freely given him of God, he may, without extraordinary revelation, in the right use of ordinary means, attain thereunto. And therefore it is the duty of everyone to give all diligence; ...thereby his heart may be enlarged in peace and joy in the Holy Ghost... and the proper fruits of this assurance....."[1]

(7) The later Heidelber Catechism (1563), while confusing faith and assurance, teaches that we may be assured by the Holy Spirit of the remission of sins.

"Question 21. What is true faith?

"it is not a mere knowledge... but it is also an assured confidence kindled in my heart by the Holy

---

1. Ibid, Vol. III, 638-640.

Ghost through the gospel whereby I acquiesce in God, certainly knowing, that not to others only, but to me also, remission of sins, eternal righteousness and life, is given gratuitously, of mercy of God on the account of the merit of Christ alone."[1]

Thus indirectly the current creeds of Wesley's time bore the stamp of his doctrine of the witness of the Spirit. Let us then turn from these indirect sources to the more direct ones to discover the springs from which this doctrine had its probable rise.

II. Direct Sources.

1. One of the most direct sources of Wesley's doctrine is Arminius and his writings. Throughout, Arminius accepts the view that one can have the witness of the Spirit as to the remission of his sins. Let us note some of these references.

"XIII. The privilege or right of the sons of God and the sending of the Spirit of adoption, with the hearts of believers, follow this liberty from the bondage of sin and the law, to which is annexed peace of conscience (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:5,6). That right also consists in their being constituted heirs of

1. Ibid, Vol. III, p.313

God...which also comes under the name of adoption... (Rom. 8:15-23). But the spirit of adoption is sent into the heart of the son of God.... that he may be the earnest, the seal, the first fruit of their inheritance."[1] Arminius is here writing on Christian liberty.

Writing on faith in Christ he says:

"III. Evangelical faith is an assent of the mind produced by the Holy Spirit, through the Gospels, in sinners, who through the law know and acknowledge their sins, and are penitent on account of them: By which they are fully persuaded within themselves that Jesus Christ.... is their own Savior, if they have believed on him."[2]

"V....which assent is not acquired by (discursum) a course of reasoning from principles known in nature; but it is an assent infused above the order of nature, which is confirmed and increased by the daily exercise of prayer... and the practice of good works."[3]

On Justification Arminius writes:

"X. The most excellent effects of this justifi-

---

1. Works of James Arminius, ed, by Nichols, Vol.II, pp.263,264.
2. Ibid, Vol.III,p.400
3. Ibid, Vol. II,p.401

cation are peace with God, and tranquility of conscience .... and an assured expectation of life eternal.

"XI... The internal seal is the Holy Spirit, testifying together with our spirits that we are the children of God, and crying Abba, Father."[1]

In these quotations, brief as they are, we find Wesley's doctrine in embryo. We discover the following points of contact: (1) There is the definite witness of the Holy Spirit. (2) This testifies together with our spirits of our adoption. (3) We find assent, or assurance which is infused from above, as Wesley felt the witness of the Spirit came. (4) This is confirmed by daily prayer and a life of good works, or the fruits of the Spirit. (5) Finally there is the testimony of a conscience void of offense. These points practically cover Wesley's doctrine in brief.

It cannot be doubted that Wesley came in direct contact with the writings of Arminius. For he called himself the Arminian, and named his magazine The Arminian Magazine. He was influenced in the final statement of his theory by this source.

1. Ibid, Vol. II,p.405

2. Wesley read William Law's "Treatise upon Christian Perfection,"[1] which while it does not have any reference to the witnessing of the Holy Spirit, contains much about the Holy Spirit in general. In Chapter IX and X Law discusses the work of the Holy Spirit in relation to the life of a Christian. He speaks of His being grieved, of the sealing of the Spirit of man, but not of His witnessing. But the Spirit produces those traits of character which Wesley would term the fruits of the Spirit.

"There is a time when our hearts are more than ordinarily raised toward God, when we feel the joys and comforts of religion, and enjoy a peace that passeth all understanding... There is a time, when either through the neglect of duty, remorse of mind, worldly vexations, bodily tempers, or the absence of God's Spirit, that we sink into dejection."[2]

While the influence from the works of Law on the life of Wesley might have been great, we cannot affirm that Wesley owed much, if any, of his doctrine of the witness of the Spirit to this source.

1. Wesley, Journal, Nov. 21,1735.
2. Law's Works, Vol. III, 329,30

3. The influence from the Quakers was most direct upon the doctrine of Wesley. Before discussing Wesley's personal contact with the Quakers in London and elsewhere, let us note first the more specific development of the doctrine of the "inner light." Schaff writes, "The ruling principle of Quakerism is the universal inner light.... It is supernatural and divine in its origin; it is a direct illumination of the mind and heart by the Spirit of God for the purpose of salvation.... It opens to the senses spiritual mysteries; it convinces and converts; it gives victory over sin, and brings joy and peace."[1] According to William Penn in the Preface to Fox's Journal, the inner light is "the fundamental principle which is as the corner-stone of their fabric.... their characteristic or main distinguishing point or principle, viz., the light of Christ within." Barclay in his Apology affirms that the testimony of the Spirit alone is the source of knowledge concerning God. "Therefore, the testimony of the Spirit is that alone by which the true knowledge of God hath been is and can be only revealed."[2]

1. Schaff, op. cit., Vol. III, p.868
2. From Theses Theologicoe, by Barclay, quoted by Schaff, op. cit., Vol. III, p.790

Through Barclay the Quakers stressed the possibility of an immediate revelation of the Spirit to the believer. He taught that the Spirit indwells every believer to lead and instruct them in the things of righteousness.[1] "The revelation of the Son of God is by the Spirit". "The Spirit witnesseth with our spirit... but not to our outward ear... But the inward and immediate revelation of God's Spirit... was by them believed as the ground and foundation of their hope in God, and life eternal."[2] "The Spirit indwells, brings all things to remembrance, and guides into all truth, directly working in the soul... It is through this Spirit that... life is obtained. It is by this Spirit that we are adopted, and 'cry Abba, Father.'"[3] "Paul accounts those sons of God who are actuated by the Spirit of God; but... He will have us call God, Father, the Spirit dictating the term unto us, which can witness to our spirits that we are the sons of God."[4] "God hath given to many of His saints and is ready to give unto all a full and certain assurance that they are his... ...

1. Barclay's Apology, p. 37.
2. Ibid, 45
3&4. Ibid, 52,53.

And that there is such assurance attainable in this life, the Acripture abundantly declareth... We also see that some... have attained a certain assurance... that they shall inherit eternal life... Concerning whom the Spirit of God testified that they are saved. Wherefore we also see such a state is attainable in this life... for seeing the Spirit of God did so testify."[1]

We thus see the type of doctrine which the Quakers held as fundamental to Christian belief and practice. There is evidence that Wesley met with numerous Quakers before his conversion, and afterward.[2] The meeting house where he was converted on the east side of Aldersgate Street, in London, where assurance first came to him, breathed the atmosphere of the Quakers.[3] Wesley could not come in contact with these people and not be influenced by their doctrines. Since Barclay their representative thinker, affirmed that one could have the witness of the Spirit to his adoption, we infer that such teaching was common among them. such has remained the case even until today. It would be natural for Wesley to have known their teachings since he was in frequent contact with Quakers.

1. Ibid, p. 255,256.
2. Wesley's Journal, p.88. 3. Ibid, p. 102.

4. The influence of the Moravians was stronger than any other in the formation of Wesley's views on the witness of the Spirit. It is impossible to estimate this influence. Methodism is indebted to them not only for some of its most distinctive features, such as the doctrine of the witness of the Spirit, but for the personal conversion of the Wesleys.

(1) Wesley's first contact with the Moravians was on board ship sailing to America. During a storm his faith wavered and he asked himself, "How is it that thou has no faith?" This was on Friday, November 23, 1735 On the following Sunday he went to the Moravians. Let his notes tell the story. "At seven I went to the Germans. I had long before observed the great seriousness of their behavior... In the midst of the psalm wherewith their service began, the sea broke over, split the main-sail in pieces, covered the ship... A terrible screaming began among the English. The Germans calmly sung on. I asked one of them afterward, 'Were you not afraid?' He answered,'I thank God, no.'"[1]

1. Wesley, Journal, Vol. I, p.19,20

Again on Saturday, Feb.7,1736, we find this note: "Mr. Oglethorpe returned from Savannah, with Mr. Spangenberg, one of the pastors of the Germans. I soon found what spirit he was of; and asked his advice with regard to my own conduct. He said, 'My brother, I must first ask you one or two questions. Have you the witness with yourself? Does the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit, that you are a child of God?' I was surprised, and knew not what to answer. He observed it, and asked, 'Do you know Jesus Christ?' I paused and said, 'I know He is the Savior of the world.' 'True,' replied he; 'but do you know He has saved you?' I answered, 'I hope he has died to save me.' He only added, 'Do you know yourself?' I said, 'I do.' But I feared they were vain words."[1]

Writing later of the event on shipboard he says, "On shipboard, however, I was again active in outward works; where it pleased God, of His free mercy, to give me twenty-six of the Moravian brethren for companions, who endeavored to show me a more excellent way."[2]

In this very early contact with the Moravians we find the doctrine of the witness of the Spirit affirmed.

1. Wesley's Journal, Vol. I, pp. 21,22.
2. Ibid, Vol. I, p.99.

He was taught to expect that when he was a child of God that he would experience this divine witness.

(2) His next contact with the Moravians was with Peter Bohler. On Feb. 7,1737, he met Peter Bohler, and while going to Oxford on the 17th of that month he and Bohler discussed doctrines. After Bohler heard Wesley preach he said, "My brother, my brother, that philosophy of yours must be purged away."[1] On March 4th he writes, "I found my brother recovering from his pleurisy; and with him Peter Bohler: by whom (in the hand of the great God) I was, on Sunday 5th, clearly convinced of unbelief; and of want of that faith whereby alone we are saved."[2] Thurs. 23. I met Peter Bohler again, and who now amazed me more and more, by the account he gave of the fruits of living faith- the holiness and happiness which he affirmed to attend it. The next morning I began the Greek Testament again, resolving to abide by the 'law and the testimony,' being confident that God would hereby show me whether this doctrine was of God."

On Saturday, April, 22,1738, Wesley and Bohler discussed the nature of faith, which doctrine as interpreted by the latter Wesley accepted. "Sat. 22.

1. Ibid, Vol. I, 83. 2. Ibid, 84

I met peter Bohler once more. I had now no objection to what he said of the nature of faith, namely, that it is 'a sure trust and confidence which a man hath in God, that through the merits of Christ his sins are forgiven, and he reconciled to the favor of God.' Neither could I deny either the happiness or holiness which he described as fruits of this living faith. 'The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God,' and 'He that believeth hath the witness in himself,' fully convinced me of the former, as 'Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin,' and 'Whosoever believeth is born of God' did of the latter."[1]

Such were the meeting of Wesley with Bohler. Marvelous blessings attended Bohler's discourses, and a work was begun as Wesley says, "such as will never come to an end, till heaven and earth pass away."[2]

The record of Bohler's meetings with the Wesleys is interesting to read according to his account as written to Zinzendorf. "I traveled with two brothers, John and Charles Wesley.... The elder, John, is a good-natured man: he knew he did not properly believe on the Savior, and was willing to be taught.... Of

1.Living Thought of Wesley, p. 211,12
2.Quoted by Tyerman, Life of John Wesley, Vol.I,p.181

faith in Jesus they have no other idea than the generality of people have."[1]

These meetings with Bohler possibly had more influence upon Wesley's life than any other. This is especially true when we consider that he was taught to expect this witness when he should be converted, and that under Bohler's teaching he was finally brought to Jesus as his personal Savior.

(3) Possibly the visit of Wesley to Hurnhut sealed the work already begun by Spangenberg and Bohler. It was here he met Zinzendorf, whose theology has been described as one of the heart. "The one idea which controlled Zinzendorf's life was the thought.... which he expressed by the words, Herzensreligion, 'heart religion.'"[2]

Under the date of Thursday, July 6, 1738, Wesley writes, "The count carried me with him to the count of Solmes.... and here I continually met with what I sought for, viz., living proofs of the power of faith, persons saved from inward as well as outward sin, by 'the love of God shed abroad in their heart;' and from all doubt and fear by the abiding witness of 'the love of God shed abroad and the Holy Ghost given unto them.'"

1. Methodist Magazine, 1854, p.687 quoted by Ibid, 181,2.
2. Schaff-Herzog, Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, Vol. XII, 516.

Again on Sunday, July 9th, he writes, "The count preached in the old castle.... to this effect:

"1. Justification is the forgiveness of sins.

"2. The moment a man flies to Christ he is justified.

"3. He has peace with God....

"4. Not perhaps may he know he is justified, till long after.

"5. For the assurance of it is distinct from justification."

During this visit he met others who taught him about the witness of the Spirit. In his"Plain Account of Christian Perfection" Wesley tells of meeting with Arvid Gardin. He says, "After he had given me an account of his experience I desired him to give me in writing a definition of 'the full assurance of faith' which he did in the following words, 'Repose in the blood of Christ; a firm confidence in God, and persuasion of His favor; the highest tranquility, serenity, and peace of mind, with a deliverance from every fleshly desire, and cessation of all, even inward sins.'

"This was the first account I ever heard from any living man of what I had before learned for myself from the Oracles of God, and had been praying for... and expecting for several years".[1]

1.Plain Account of Christian Perfection, 252

Under the date of August 8,1738, he writes of another whom he met in Germany, "On Wednesday and Thursday I had an opportunity of talking with Michael Linner.... Four times I enjoyed the blessing of hearing him preach.... Thrice he described the state of those who are 'weak in faith'.... who have received the forgiveness through the blood of Jesus.... before they are comforted by the abiding witness of the Spirit."

(4) Before passing from the influence of the Moravians upon Wesley let us note the presence of the teaching of the witness of the Spirit in their creeds and liturgy. In the Easter Litany of the Moravian Church (1749) which is the chief confession of that organization, we read:

"I believe in the Holy Ghost.... that He should bear witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, and teach us to cry Abba, Father."[1]

The"Synod of 1869" wrote, "5. The doctrine of the Holy Ghost and the operations of His grace: that it is He who works in us the knowledge of

1.Schaff, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 802

of sin, faith in Jesus, and the witness that we are the children of God."[1] While this is a century or more later than the period of which we write, still it shows the trace of the doctrine of the witness of the Spirit.

Until Wesley met the Moravians faith had meant an entellectual acceptance of the creeds. But when Spangenberg and Bohler taught him the meaning of faith in Christ as self surrender, personal trust, and having as its central object the atonement of Christ, faith became living. He began to believe that forgiveness through faith was sustained by the supernatural, and was testified to by the Holy Spirit. "Wesley confessed that Bohler's teaching was the true gospel teaching.... All dates from his final acceptance of Bohler's teaching."[2] This was the pivot around which the transformation of Wesley's life and future doctrines was to center.

5. A final source of Wesley's doctrine is to be discovered in his conversion, and attendant witness of the Spirit. Psychologically this source is of the greatest import.

1. Ibid, Vol. III, p. 881
2. The Contemporary Review, J.H.Riggs, "Wesley," 1876, pp.656, 6.

(1). There had been planted into his mind the idea that he was to expect this witness of the Spirit when converted. The first thing Spangenberg asked him was whether or not he had the witness of the Spirit that he was a child of God. Bohler continually referred to the necessity of knowing that one's sins are forgiven, and that the Spirit witnesseth with his spirit that he is converted. Wesley turned to his Greek Testament to find this doctrine, whether or not it was of God, and in Romans 8:15, 16 he discovered it. Zinzendorf preached to him that he should receive this witness. In the testimonies which he heard at Herrnhut there was a continual reiteration of a possession of this witness. Wesley likewise expected that when he believed he whould "have the Witness in himself."

He lacked peace before his conversion, and longed for the peace which would come when the Spirit witnessed with his spirit that he was God's child. On May 19, 1738, a few days before his conversion (May 24) he wrote to a friend:

"I am under the same condemnation.... I know every thought, every temper of my soul, ought to bear God's image and superscription. But how am I fallen from the glory of God! I feel that 'I am sold under sin.' I know that I deserve nothing but wrath, being full of all abominations.... I am unholy.... I am a sinner, meet to be consumed. "Yet I hear a voice.... saying, 'Believe and thou shalt be saved.'....

"O let no one deceive us by vain words, as if we had already attained this faith! By its fruits we shall know. Do we already feel 'peace with God,' and 'joy in the Holy Ghost'? Does 'his Spirit bear witness with our spirit that we are the children of God'? Alas, with mine he does not."

In this we see the cry of his heart for peace which should attend the witness of the Spirit. He had been taught that his agony of soul resulted because his sins had not been forgiven, and he had not been justified, which experience he would know had taken place only when he had the witness of the Spirit that he was a child of God. It

would thus be natural that when converted, and when peace should come, that he should interpret this as the witness of the Spirit. When he wrote his doctrine of conversion central to it should be this view of the witness of the Holy Spirit. This is especially true when he finds a biblical basis for his teaching and experience as he did in Romans 8:15, 16, where so plainly the Spirit is said to witness "with our spirit that we are the children of God."

(2) At the time of his conversion he found this calm assurance which he had so long sought. In seeking for this he said, "Besides I well saw, no one could (in the nature of things) have such a sense of forgiveness, and not feel it.... I was now thoroughly convinced, and by the grace of God, I resolved to seek it unto the end: 1. By absolutely renouncing all dependence.... upon my own works of righteousness, on which I had grounded my hope of salvation.... 2. By adding to the constant use of all the other means of grace, continual prayer for this very thing, justifying, saving faith.... I continued to seek it till Wednesday,

May 24. I think it was about five in the morning that I opened my Testament on those words, 'There are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, even that ye should be partakers of the divine nature' (2Pet. 1:4). Just as I went out, I opened it again on those words: "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God"....

"In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I feel I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me, that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death....

"My soul continued in peace.... I walked in peace"[1]

He had found peace through the assurance which was given him that his sins had been taken away. It was this for which he had striven, and

1.Journal, Vol. I, pp. 101-103 passim.

which he had expected to crown his long search. It was from his own experience that he could then proclaim the doctrine of the joint testimony of the Holy Spirit and the human spirit that one is a child of God. His then was an experience centered doctrine, taught in the Bible and verified by his own life. Whatever other sources may exist for his doctrine, this is the crowning one. He could not rewrite his doctrine without going back to May 24, 1738, "about a quarter to nine" when his heart was strangely warmed, and he felt the assurance, and altering that experience.

His was an "I know" dogma, taught by Paul, urged to be sought for by Bohler, held out as the hope of salvation by Spangenberg, and above all a motivating influence in his spiritual life. When he preached to others about conversion necessarily he would urge them to seek forgiveness until the possessed the witness of the Spirit that the work had been wrought. When he made the doctrinal statement for the Methodist church, there is little wonder that among these creedal sermons

should be found three on this joint witness of the Holy Spirit and the human spirit or conscience.

He had found a doctrine which the Bible affirmed, and the Reformers accepted. The "inner light" of the Quakers became the inner witness of the Spirit. The calm persuasion of Calvin was transmuted into the assurance of a supernatural evidence. The subjective hope of Luther is now in Wesley a "heart strangely warmed." As he wrote,"I apprehended that the whole Christian church of the first centuries enjoyed it.... And I really conceive, both from the Harmonia Confessionum and whatever else I have occasionally read that all the reformed church of Europe did once believe it.... Every true church has the divine evidence of being in favor with God.... I know likewise that Luther, Melanchthon and many other (if not all) of the reformers frequently and strongly assert that every believer is conscious of his own acceptance with God, and that by a supernatural evidence."[1]

1. McClintock and Strong, Biblical Theological and Ecclesiastical Cyclopedia, Vol. I, p. 485.

Chapter three. The History of the Doctrine of Assurance.

I. The Doctrine of Assurance and Wesley's Doctrine of the Witness of the Spirit.

There are two types of the doctrine of assurance which are ofttimes confused. Some theologians write of the doctrine of assurance and refer to the theory of Christian certainty whereby they defend the authority of the Bible, the finality of the Christian religion, and the grounds of belief in the assurity that Christianity is the true religion. Others assume that when they write of assurance they mean that definiteness of knowledge, possessed by the regenerate individual, that he is a child of God. Still others, as Robbins in "The Doctrine of Assurance in Recent Protestant Theology, go back and forth from the assurance of salvation to the certainty of the Christian religion with no breaks in their arguments.

As noted in the Introduction, we understand the doctrine of assurance to have reference to the assurance of salvation, and in no manner to be

connected with the problem of the defense of the Christian faith, or a statement of the metaphysical theory of religious authority. However, we must note that the evidence of Christian experience stands as one of the highest apolegetic arguments for the veracity of the claims of Christianity. We then define assurance of salvation as the knowledge which the regenerated possess concerning their adoption as sons of God. It is at this point that Wesley's doctrine of the witness of the Spirit is in accord with the doctrine of the assurance of salvation. To Wesley the goal for every Christian was to possess the assurance that he was a child of God. He often speaks of one being regenerated "and knowing it" . In his theology it would be impossible for one to be converted "and not know it", unless it was during some abnormal experience of ill health or other highly terrifying strain. Wesley appealed to experience for the assurance of salvation. He said that "I know I am a Christian because I have

the witness of the Spirit."

With this distinction in mind let us lay the background for Wesley's doctrine by a brief outline of the history of the assurance of salvation.

II. Types of the Doctrine of Assurance.

Six various doctrines of assurance have been held by the Christian Church, and each is distinct in its broad outlines from the others. Let us note these doctrines in detail.

1. The Doctrine of the Catholic Church. Generally the doctrine of assurance previous to the Reformation was denied by Catholic theologians. The system of penance, and father confessors and indulgences, which had been developed through the centuries, was contrary to the idea of a personal, direct contact with God, whereby one knew that he was regenerated. Workman says, " This doctrine of assurance was altogether contradictory to the whole scheme of indulgence, penance, purgatory and sacerdotalism in general."[1]

In answer to a query of a sick woman seeking to know that her sins were forgiven, Gregory the

1. Workman, Op. cit. Vol. I, p. 35.

Great wrote, "Thou oughtest not to become secure about thy sins, except when, in the last day of life, thou shalt be able no longer to bewail them. But until that day comes, thou oughtest ever suspicious and fearful to be afraid of faults, and wash them with daily tears."[1]

We are forced to hold with Fisher that the scholastic conception of justification had no foundation for assurance. "Under the scholastic conception of justification and of the nature of faith, no foundation for assurance, for a sure and established confidence in one's Christian standing, could exist. According to Aquinas, the only means open for attaining an assured hope are certain signs or indications which, however, afford no certainty, and an immediate revelation from God which is sometimes given to individuals as a special privilege."[2] While Aquinas held that God might give a special revelation of one's standing, this is but rarely found to exist. So in reality this one hope of finding assurance of

1. Gregory the Great, Epistles, VI, p.25.
2. Fisher, Hist. of Ch. Doctrine, p. 250

personal salvation in the pre-Reformation period vanished.[1]

It would be expected that the "morning star of the Reformation," Wyclif, would hold this doctrine. But in fact he denies it. He writes, "No one can know, not even the Pope, whether he be of the Church or whether he be a limb of the fiend."[2]

The Roman view can be summarized thus, "The Roman Catholic church remained by the position that assurance of being in a state of grace is an exceptional gift, the great majority of believers being obliged to be satisfied with a probability on this subject."[3]

When we come to the post-Reformation period, even the possibility of this assurance which Aquinas would permit disappears. We find the Council of Trent most positive in denying that one may know of a certainty that he is in a state of divine grace. "....Yet it is not to be said, that sins are forgiven or have been forgiven to anyone who boasts of his confidence and certain-

1.Aquinas, Summa Totius Theologiae, Part II,I, Quest.112
2.Workman, Dawn of the Reformation, I,p.176, Art.5
3.Sheldon, History of Christian Doctrine, Vol.II,pp.178-9

anyone who boasts of his confidence and certainty of the remission of his sins; seeing that it may exist, yea does in our day exist, amongst heretics and schismatics; and with great vehemence is this vain confidence, and one alien from all godliness, preached up in opposition to the Catholic church....even so each one, when he regards himself, and his own weakness and indisposition, may have fear and apprehension touching his own grace; seeing that no one can know with a certainty of faith, which cannot be subject to error, that he has obtained the grace of God."[1]

More specifically we read, "Except by special revelation no one can know whom God hath elected ....No one, moreover.... ought to be so as to presume as regards the secret mystery of divine predestination, as to determine for certain that he is assuredly in the number of the predestinate .... for except by special revelation, it cannot be known whom God hath chosen unto himself."[2]

1.Canoes et Decreta Dogmatica Concilii Tridentine, Sixth Session,Chap. IX, in Schaff, Op. Cit. Vol. II,98,99.
2.Sixth Session, Chap. XII, Schaff, op. cit. 103.

This again is the old position of Aquinas reaffirmed, with the underlying thought of the impossibility of such a revelation.

Robert Bellarmin brings out the current discussion between the Catholics and the Protestants thus, "The question in debate between Romanists and the Reformed was, Whether anyone should or could without a special revelation, be certain with the certainty of a divine faith, to which error in no way pertains, that his sins are remitted?" To which the Romanists said "No."[1]

Moehler in his Symbolik shows the position of the Romanists with reference to assurance of salvation. "Catholics have no criterion by which to distinguish the operations of grace from the achievements of man, and assurance is impossible ...."Without false security(the Catholic) awaits the day on which God shall produce his final reward."[2]

After the Reformation one divergent Catholic opinion is found. The Catholic scholar Katharinus

1.Bellarmin, Justification, Liber III, cap.3.
2.Moehler, Symbolik, pp. 154-6

did not believe that the authority of the scholastics was binding, and affirmed that the certitudo gratiae, or certitude of grace, was in accordance with the doctrine of Rome.[1] His opinion did not receive the sanction of universal Catholic belief and can be accepted as a divergent view from the standard.

However, in modern Roman theology Alphonso Leguori has made a place for assurance. It is not the assurance of one's conscience, or of the "inner light," or of the witness of the Spirit. It is a certainty of grace resting upon the authority of the father confessor. The father confessor, he affirms, because of his sacerdotal position can avow to the penitent that his sins are forgiven.[2]

But still the great dividing line between Romanists and Protestants remains as the doctrine of assurance, Romanists denying it, except by special revelation, and Protestants affirming it. Schaff sums up the position of the two groups thus, "Assurance of justification and salvation: denied (except on the ground of a special revelation) by Roman Catholics; asserted by Protestants (though

1. Hastings, Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics Vol.III,p.326
2. Harnack, History of Dogma, Vol. VII,p.108

in different degrees)"[1]

2. The Lutheran Doctrine of Subjective and Objective Assurance. Two positions have been held by the Lutherans with reference to assurance. Luther himself affirmed his belief in the possibility of a subjective assurance that one was in a state of grace. With this he laid the foundation whereby his followers could affirm that assurance was also objective in that God through the instrumentality of the Bible assures the believer that he is in favor with Him.

(1) Luther firmly denounced the position of the Romanists with reference to salvation and assurance in no uncertain tones. In his commentary on Galatians, he writes, "The pope by this infamous dogma (concerning assurance) by which he had commanded men to doubt respecting the favor of God toward themselves, had banished God and all the promises from the church, overthrown the benefits of Christ and abolished the entire gospel. Such unwholesome results necessarily follow, because men depend not upon the promising God, but upon their own works and merits."[2]

1. Schaff, Op. cit., Vol. I, p. 925.
2. Luther, Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians, Chap. 4.

(2) Luther believed in the possibility of subjective assurance of salvation for the believer. As Dorner happily says he had tasted the assurance of reconciliation through Christ and wrote it into his doctrine. "There is therefore such a thing as personal assurance; we may feel the crying of the Spirit in the heart; for it is at the same time the cry of the heart itself, the Spirit cried with all power, i.e., with the whole and a full heart, so that the whole lives and moves in confidence (Rom. 8:16,26). Thus this crying of the Spirit is nothing else than a mighty, strong, unwavering, trustful looking with the whole heart to God as a beloved Father.... The witness of the Holy Spirit is just this, that by His operation our heart is possessed of consolation, confidence, and childlike prayer."[1] Thus we see that there is a subjective assurance, a calm persuasion, of the certainty of grace, but not an immediate, direct witness of the Spirit as Wesley would have us believe.

1. Luther's Werke von Walch, Vol. Vii, 1030-33, Quoted by Dorner, History of Protestant Theology, Vol. I, pp. 237,8

(3) Again this subjective persuasion is avowed to exist along with the objective assurance of the Word: "That we are God's children and may certainly regard ourselves such, we have not of ourselves or of the law; but it is the testimony of the Holy Ghost who, against the law, and the feeling of our unworthiness gives us, in our weakness, such testimony and assures us of it. The testimony is of such a nature that we also feel and experience the power of the Holy Ghost which He works in us through the Word, and our experience agrees with the Word or preaching. For when in need and sorrow you receive consolation from the gospel, you can feel this in you and thereby you overcome such doubt and terror, so that your heart firmly concludes that you have a gracious God, and that you no more flee from Him, but, in such faith, can joyfully call upon Him and expect aid from Him... Such is the true inner witness whereby you learn that the Holy Ghost is working in you. Besides you have also external signs and marks, that He gives you especial gifts, a spiritual understanding, grace

and success in your calling, etc., that you have pleasure and love for His Word, and confess the same, even with danger of body and life."[1]

It is thus through the illumination of the Word by the Holy Spirit that the soul is persuaded of acceptance with God. This subjective assurance coming from the Spirit and objective assurance coming from the Word unite to form the constant persuasion that one is a child of God.

On this score again Luther says, "Faith is not acceptance of a list of doctrines, it is the certainty of the forgiveness of sins."[2] "Faith arises from reception of the Word, is the gift of the Holy Spirit, with which inner witness are external signs"[3] Here Luther is speaking of saving faith carrying with it the certainty of the forgiveness of sins. This position Wesley would deny. To Wesley assurance of salvation is not a part of saving faith, but comes by a direct witness of the Spirit.

(4) Luther denounces the position of Catholicism that the believer remains in uncertainty as to his state of grace. There may be a fluctuation in

1. Quoted by the Lutheran Commentary on Romans, from Luther's Commentary, p. 158.
2. Works, Vol. 14, p. 12.
3. Ibid, Vol. I, p. 126.

the definiteness of this subjective and objective assurance, nevertheless every believer may possess this certainty.[1]

(5) The great Reformer likewise in no uncertain tones disavows his belief in the idea that assurance comes through the church. Rome had taught him to say that through indulgences, confessions, penance and submission to the dictates of the Catholic church he could be saved, and that he should rest his certainty by living in accordance with her commands. But to him certainty of salvation, after his great spiritual reformation through faith, became a matter of the living definiteness of grace working through his being.[2]

(6) Luther's doctrine declared his belief in the fact that we could be certain that our assurance was of the Spirit and not of the flesh. Sheldon says that he believed evidence of our sonship was given in such a way as to effect in us "the consciousness that what our heart testifies is the result of the testimony of the Spirit and not the imagination of the flesh."[3] By this means Luther

1. See his Commentary on Galatians, Chap. 4:6
2. Works, Vol. XX, p. 185
3. Sheldon, Op. Cit., Vol. II.p.179.

at once stilled the clamoring of his critics who said that this supposed testimony is the result of the imagination, and not of the Holy Spirit speaking to the consciousness and illuminating the Word.

3. Calvin's Doctrine of Present and Future Assurance. Calvin affirmed his belief in the assurance of salvation as existing in the present, but to him the greater thought was the certainty of final salvation. To be assured of present grace is to know that one is predestined to final salvation. A definite doctrine of immediate assurance of one's standing in the sight of God is impossible. "With Calvin a logical doctrine of assurance is impossible, for inasmuch as the source of salvation is external, in the immutable decrees, the certitude of salvation must take form of a special revelation"[1]

(1) Calvin stated the fact that one could be assured of the witness of the Spirit. On this point he did now waver. He wrote, "He does not simply state that the Spirit of God is witnessing to our spirit, but he uses a compound verb

1. Workman, Op. Cit., Vol. I, p. 23.

signifying to bear witness together with another. Paul means, the Spirit of God affords such a testimony that our spirit can determine the adoption of God to be firm and unshaken.... For while the Spirit testifies that we are the children of God he at the same time infuses this confidence into our minds."[1] He is here commenting on Romans 8:15,16. This certainly proceedeth not from man's brain but is the testimony of the Spirit of God".[2] This is from the same passage.

(2) The main emphasis in Calvin's system is on the certainty of future more than of immediate salvation. Hence the result was that the Reformed churches placed more stress on the certainty of future salvation than on the fact of the forgiveness of sins and of adoption. On this point Calvin says, "Therefore, as God regenerates forever the elect alone with incorruptible seed, so that the seed of life planted in their hearts never perishes; so he firmly seals within them the grace of his adoption, that it may be confirmed and ratified

1.Calvin's Commentary on the Epistle to Romans,
2. Ibid.

to their minds.... The Spirit properly seals remission of sins in the elect alone, and they apply it by a special faith to their own benefit.... He vouchsafes to the elect alone, the living root of faith, that they may persevere even to the end."[1]

The Reformed churches claimed to have risen above the certainty of mere human subjective conviction to an immediate and final apprehension of objective certainty of salvation as ultimately founded upon the eternal divine purpose.[2] Hastie believes that the principle of absolute predestination logically took shape as the ultimate expression of Protestant reformers in their search for a certain and infallible ground upon which to base the personal assurance of salvation.[3]

(3) This doctrine of present and future certainty of salvation is expressed by a modern reformed theologian as follows, "It is God's present forgiveness and acceptance of which we have experimental knowledge and which is the ground of our confidence.... It is true.... our thought

1.Calvin, Institutes, Book III, p.24
2.See Hastings, Op. cit., Vol. III, p. 328.
3.Hastie, Theology of the Reformed Church, pp.231ff

reaches out inevitably to the future, and the consciousness of present salvation, acceptance, and forgiveness passes imperceptibly into the hope of final salvation."[1] This is a refinement of the doctrine of the Reformers. Wesley's reaction to this phase of the doctrine is that today one may possess the assurance of adoption, but through sin this assurance can be lost. To him there is no relationship existent between immediate and final salvation. This, of course, is due to his position with reference to apostasy, whereby he affirms that the truly regenerate may fall from grace and finally apostacize.

(4) It is necessary to note the distinction which later Calvinistic theologians made between faith and assurance. It is to be remembered that Luther did not hold to such a distinction. Turretin, Calvin's later representative, clearly defined faith and assurance, so much so that the distinction could be said to be accepted by Wesley. He writes, "The diversity which occurs between the orthodox

---

1. Brown, Christian Theology in Outline, 387

has arisen from a different usage of the word fiducia (confidence) which may be taken in three senses: (1) For confident assent, or persuasion... (2) For the act of fleeing to and receiving Christ. (3) For confidence, satisfaction, and tranquility of mind, which arises from the refuge of the mind to Christ and reception of Him. In the first and second sense confidence is of the essence of faith, is rightly said by theologians to be its form; because .... it is confidence in the gospel. But in the third sense it is by others rightly said not to be the form, but the fruit, of faith; because it is born from it, but does not constitute it."[1] Hence as Wesley would avow assurance is the fruit of faith, and not an inseparable part of faith.

The earlier theologians of the Reformation in their desire to make justifying faith the final ideal regarded assurance as a necessary implication of it. As Cunningham says, "The Reformers in general maintained its necessity and in order, as it were to secure it in the speediest and most effectual way, usually represented it as necessarily

1. Turretin, Op. cit. Les. 15; Quaest. 10

involved in the very nature of the first completed act of saving faith."[1]

But the Westminister Confession, following the lead of Turretin, broke away from this and maintained that believers may attain unto "an infallible assurance of faith, founded upon the divine truth of the promised salvation, the inward evidences of those graces unto which these promises are made, the testimony of the Spirit witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God.... This infallible assurance doth not so belong to the essence of faith but that a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties before he be a partaker of it."[2]

It was this distinction which finally prepared the way for Wesley's doctrine of the direct witness of the Spirit to the believer's adoption. For if saving faith and assurance were the same, there could be no separate witness of the Spirit.

Wesley through the line of the Moravians elevated this distinction, and completely separated assurance from the doctrine of faith as the ground

1. Cunningham, Historical Theology, Vol. II.70
   Quoted by Sheldon, op. cit., Vol. II, p.179
2. Westminster Confession, Ch. 18

of salvation. He made assurance not an integral part of saving faith, but the result of the Spirit's witness that through faith one had been regenerated; the Modern Anglican church accepts this distinction, and makes assurance subjective and individual. Strong writes, "It is certainly subjective; that is it comes not only to the church as a whole, but to each individual soul.... The peace which comes to those who receive the Holy Ghost inspires them with certainty."[1]

4. The Inwardness of Religious Certainty- the "Inner Light" of the Quakers. The test of certainty with the Quakers was not whether the church affirmed that one would be saved by following its regime as the Romanists avowed or whether the Spirit spoke through the Bible as the Lutherans believed, or whether with the Calvinists one had attained unto the hope of eternal election, resting upon the divine decrees, but it was the inwardness of divine assurance coming through "the inner light." The test of this became the test of certainty, and this experience was "the inner light."

1.Strong, Manual of Theology, p. 736

George Fox wrote, "I was commanded to turn people to that inward light.... by which all might know their salvation."[1] "The light is that which teachest thus of God in yourself."[2] Every man according to Fox has in him a portion of this "inner light" which is of the Spirit. In regeneration this Light is strengthened, and is the source of the certainty of salvation. This becomes a separate revelation, distinct from the Bible, though it can be tested by the same.

The Quakers insisted upon the trustworthiness of this religious consciousness in the matters of assurance, and thus restated the doctrine of Paul. This "light" was tested by the unity of Christian consciousness as the final authority, that is, by the united church of believers possessing the "light". It would thus seem that authority rests primarily in the individual consciousness, as tested and affirmed by the church and not in the Bible.

Rufus M. Jones, a modern exponent of early Quaker doctrines, states this theory thus, "That I am I, is the clearest of all facts, but nobody could prove it to me if I lacked the testimony of

1.Journal, Vol. I, p.36
2.Ibid, Vol. I 342.

consciousness. I know that I have found freedom from the sense of sense... peace through the forgiveness, only because I know it, because it is witnessed within, not because some man in sacred past has announced it, or because I have read it in some book, that such an experience is mine."[1]

5. Wesley's Doctrine of the Joint Witness. Wesley's doctrine consists of the joint witness of the divine and the human spirits. (1) It is not to be understood, as we shall point out in the next chapter, that this doctrine was not new to Wesley, for he quoted from Homilies of the Church of England, and from Hooker.[2] But with him it became a working creed. Wesley's father said to him while dying, "The inner witness, son, the inner witness; this is the proof, the strongest proof of Christianity."[3] As his father died in 1735, some years before the formation of his doctrine, we see that the theory was current at that time.

(2) When Wesley learned that the Hernhuters

1. Jones, Social Law in the Spiritual World, p.171
2. Hooker, Works, III, p. 673.
3. Quoted by Workman, op. cit., I, p. 138.

combined the witness of the Spirit with the taking of the Communion, which was the extreme view of the Moravians, he could not accept the doctrine in this form; but stated his theory as a twofold witness coming directly from the Spirit and the human spirit. In Wesley's revival he reaffirmed the doctrine of the witness of the Spirit which had been latent all the while, as Luther had reaffirmed the nature of justification by faith.[1] The distinctive addition which he made emphasized this joint testimony and affirmed that (a) assurance is possible to all believers; (b) assurance is a direct witness of the Holy Spirit; (c) assurance is confirmed by the indirect witness of the conscience.

(3) Wesley took the various types of assurance as his heritage and reinterpreted them. From the fathers of the church assurance was based on the Bible, as interpreted by tradition-hence authority came through the church, the highest voice of tradition interpreting the Bible. Luther swings from the church to the Bible, as the authority of salvation, plus the subjective testimony of the

1.Hastings, Op. cit., Vol. III, 329

Holy Spirit. Pietism in the age of formalism in the Lutheran church placed its emphasis on the Holy Spirit as interpreting the Bible and illuminating the soul. The Quakers held to the doctrine of an inner illumination coming from the Spirit, and independent of the Bible, as the source of authority and assurance.

Wesley adds fire to the doctrine of the Pietists and Quakers, and with the witness of the Spirit of Luther, he combines the idea of a direct witness of the Spirit, plus the testimony of the conscience and of good works. From this he builds his doctrine of assurance of salvation. To him the church alone is not sufficient. He would not cast it off. But with the voice of the church must come the direct witness of the Spirit before one is assured of his salvation. While he accepts the Bible as the final source of Christian doctrine, it alone cannot assure one of acceptance with God. This remains for the Spirit to do. The illumination of the Spirit through an "inner light" must be vivified by an immediate testimony of the Spirit combining with a similar testimony of the conscience before

one can know "that he is saved." When such testimonies exist then one is regenerated "and knows it", as Wesley would say.

Chapter Four. An Analysis of Wesley's Doctrine

I Distinction Between Justifying Faith and the Witness of the Spirit.

As has been noted in the history of the doctrine of assurance and in the study of the source of Wesley's doctrine, he made a distinction between justifying faith and the witness of the Spirit, or assurance of salvation. While he affirms that it is the common privilege of every believer he denies that it is of the essence of justifying faith. Assurance is not a part of saving faith, as Turrentin has so clearly pointed out, but it is a result of that faith. Justifying faith purchases salvation; while assurance comes after the process of redemption is finished.

On this subject Wesley says, "Is justifying faith a sense of pardon? Negatur. 1. Everyone is deeply concerned to understand this question well; but preachers most of all. 2. By justifying faith I mean that faith which whosoever hath it not is under wrath and the curse of God. By a sense

sense of pardon I mean a distinct explicit assurance that my sins are forgiven. I allow (1) that there is an explicit assurance; (2) that it is the common privilege of real Christians; (3) that it is the proper Christian faith which 'purifieth the heart' and 'overcometh the world.' But I cannot allow that justifying faith is such an assurance, or necessarily connected therewith. 3. Because if justifying faith necessarily implies such an explicit assurance of pardon, then everyone who has it not and everyone so long as he has it not is under the wrath and the curse of God. But this supposition is contrary to Scripture as well as to experience. Contrary to Isa. 50:10 and Acts 10:34, 35. Again, the assertion 'justifying faith is a sense of pardon,' is contrary to reason: it is flatly absurd. For how can a sense of pardon be the condition of our receiving it?"[1]

1. Here two distinct elements are set before us: justifying faith, and the sense of pardon, or assurance. Justifying faith, in Wesley's Arminian

1. Works, XII, 109-110.

theology, is the approach to God. After the steps of repentance, and forsaking of sin, which lead up to conversion, have been taken, justifying faith believes that the work is accomplished, and that God freely forgives through the atonement of Christ. It is the means of obtaining justification in the sight of God, or adoption into the family of God. It is the first element, and when its work is accomplished it is no longer related to the process. Faith, Wesley describes as: "The only instrument of salvation is faith, that is, a sure trust and confidence that God both hath and will forgive our sins, that he hath accepted us again into his favor, for the merits of Christ's death and passion."[1] Faith is the necessary condition of justification. Yes, and the only necessary condition thereof."[2]

2. The sense of pardon, as the second element, comes after justifying faith has purchased redemption. This assurance follows the act of justifica-

1.Sermons, Vol. I, p. 50
2. Ibid, Vol. I. p. 51.

tion. It may vary in strength, and constancy in different individuals, still it exists when one is a believer. Wesley would say that it does not always come immediately after one is pardoned, but soon after it will be experienced. While it may follow immediately after, faith accepts forgiveness, and so soon after that one cannot distinguish the one act from the other, still it would be contrary to Wesley's theology to say that they are identical. On this score he is most positive.

As we have seen elsewhere in making this distinction he is following the statement of the Westminster Confession and Turrentin.

II. Calvinistic Doctrine Opposed to the Witness of the Spirit.

Wesley's intense Arminianism made him feel the necessity of warning Calvinists of their doctrine of final assurance as being opposed to the witness of the Spirit, and hence to the Pauline dogma as expressed in Romans 8:15,16. He felt that the theory of Calvinism limited the atonement to the elect, and in so doing it obstructed the doctrine of the witness of the Spirit. It must be remem-

bered that during the time of Wesley the demarkation between Arminianism and Calvinism was definite. It was a choice between one or the other position. Men arranged themselves on sides as opposing armies. To us who live in an age when theological distinctions are rapidly disappearing, it is difficult to understand Wesley's antagonism.

"And as to you," writes Wesley, "who believe yourselves the elect of God, what is your happiness? I hope not a notion, a speculative belief, a bare opinion of of any kind: but a feeling possessing of God's Spirit, wrought in you by the Holy Ghost, or the witness of God's Spirit with your spirit that you are a child of God. This otherwise termed 'the full assurance of faith,' is the true ground of Christian happiness. And it does indeed imply a full assurance that all your past sins are forgiven, and that you are now a child of God. But it does not necessarily imply a full assurance of your future perseverance.... Now this witness of the Spirit, experience shows

to be much obstructed by this doctrine...And I appeal to any of you who hold this doctrine, to say between God and your own hearts, whether you have not often a return of doubts and fears concerning your election or perseverance? If you ask, Who has not? I answer, very few of those what hold this doctrine- but many...many of those who hold it not... have enjoyed the uninterrupted witness of His Spirit, the continual light of His countenance, from the moment they first believed for many months or years to this day."[1]

This is another way Wesley had of saying that the witness of the Spirit testified to one's present salvation, but not to his final perseverance. His theology contained no place for a belief in election or perseverance. He held that one could be genuinely converted, possess the definite witness of the Spirit, backslide, and finally lose his soul. Such views are contrary to the doctrine of Calvinism. For Wesley the atonement was unlimited, justifying faith, when the conditions were met, purchased redemption for all men.

1.Sermons, Vol. I, p. 485

While the theory of Calvinism limited the atonement to the elect, which election assured one of final salvation. To him salvation was present, and not final, and the witness of the Spirit assured one of his immediate status before God, but not of his final perseverance.

III. Wesley's Definition of the Witness of the Spirit.

Wesley defines the testimony of God's Spirit as "an inward impression on the soul, whereby the Spirit of God directly witnesses to my spirit, that I am a child of God; that Jesus Christ hath loved me, and given Himself for me; and that all my sins are blotted out, and I, even I, am reconciled to God."[1] Let us note the distinctive elements entering into this witness.

1. It is an inward impression coming to the soul. As Luther would say it is a subjective experience coming to the soul. In clarifying this doctrine Pope says that this assurance is the "gift of the Holy Ghost, whose office is to bear witness to the conscience..."[2]

1.Sermons, Vol. I,p.87
2.Pope, Compendium of Theology, Vol. III,p.115

This impression is infused dynamically upon the human consciousness. It comes directly from the Spirit, and is not produced through human instrumentalities. Wesley would deny that it is the result of psychological forces, which through a strong desire, or wish, end in a supposed testimony from the Spirit. It is supernatural in nature and origin.

2. It operates upon the human spirit, speaks to the conscience. It comes not as a vision, nor does it speak in audible tones. It effects nevertheless an unmistakable impression on the soul that God's Spirit is testifying.

3. It witnesses to a definite thing, of one's adoption as a child of God. This witness affirms, according to Wesley, that one is loved of Jesus, that one's sins are blotted out, and that reconciliation has been effected between the sinner and God. Some writers, who accept Wesley's views on this point, would disagree with him as to the nature of the Spirit's witness, and would limit it to

adoption as a child of God. For this is the limitation set by the text in Romans, on which the theory is builded.

IV. Assurance of Salvation a Joint Witness.

Wesley interpreted the witness of the Spirit, or the assurance of salvation, or the assurance of faith, as often he called it, as consisting of the joint testimony of both the Holy Spirit and the witness of the human spirit. His sermons are so full of this that one or two quotations will suffice. He says:

"A second scriptural mark of those who are born of God is hope.... This hope,(termed in the epistle of the Hebrews, Chap. 10:22, and Chapter 3:11.... 'the full assurance of faith and the full assurance of hope,' expressions the best which our language can afford, though far weaker than those in the original), as described in Scripture, implied, first, the testimony of our own spirit or conscience that we walk 'in simplicity and godly sincerity;' but secondly, and chiefly, the testimony of the Spirit of God 'bearing witness with,' or 'to our

own spirit, that we are the children of God,' 'and if children then heirs, heirs of God, and jointheirs with Christ!"[1]

1. First we note the divine element in this witness. Throughout His writings, Sermons, Journal and Notes, we find reference to this element. It is the Holy Spirit himself. He refers to Gal. 4:6, where Paul writes, "Ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba Father." His first discussion in Sermon X on "The Witness of the Spirit" is to define this divine Spirit as the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit. This is not the conscience speaking, but the conscience being spoken to by a supernatural power or person, the Holy Ghost. This testimony of the Holy Spirit precedes all love of God and all holiness, "of consequence it must precede our inward consciousness thereof, or the testimony of our spirit concerning them."[2]

Wesley would make it very clear that it is God who speaks in his testimony, and not the fruit

1. Sermons, Vol. I, p. 157.
2. Ibid, p. 88

of any righteousness or holiness. He would affirm that if there be no divine testimony, then it may be a "delusion of the devil," or the results of an abnormal mind, or mode of thinking and hence one would be deceived. He is definite on the stand that when the Spirit witnesses, there is no possible chance of deception. It is at this point that the more recent Methodist theologians disagree with Wesley. Sheldon says, "It is also the method of producing conviction as to the personal standing of a believer before God. All that is needed for assurance ordinarily is the existence of vital spiritual affections"[1]

Curtis[2] says that there are three methods by which one may attain Christian assurance, which are: (1) Inference from the fact that we possess Christian traits; (2) Conscience may affirm this when we have peace of conscience. (3) The Holy Spirit can augment this assurance of conscience to what is really an intuition that God has forgiven the sinner. (4) Finally there is the witness of the Spirit. But this last testimony is not

1. Sheldon, System of Christian Doctrine, p. 473
2. Curtis, The Christian Faith, pp. 367-9

as definite as that of Wesley.

2. There is also the concomitant human testimony, or the witness of the human spirit. It is this second element which most recent writers emphasize while Wesley makes it subordinate to the witness of the Holy Spirit. This is usually the testimony of the conscience, "even the testimony of our own conscience, that God hath given us to be holy of heart and holy in outward conversation."[1] It is the unmistakable evidence or consciousness of having received the spirit of adoption, and of having a loving heart toward all the children of God. It is a consciousness of being inwardly conformed by the Spirit of God to the image of the Son, and that we "walk before him in justice, mercy, and truth, doing those things which are pleasing in his sight."[2]

Let us note how Cheldon would interpret this human testimony. He says, "Assurance may not be so of the essence of justifying faith that the absence of the one is the proof of the lack of

1. Sermons, Vol. I, p. 87
2. Ibid.

the other...But to deny that the normal Christian consciousness contains the element of assurance, as defined above, is to go in the face of the most explicit teachings of the New Testament.... Some of these words cited imply that at the basis os assurance there is a witnessing both of the Divine Spirit and man's spirit."[1] Sheldon lacks the definiteness of Wesley as to a knowledge of this consciousness coming as a crisis. Elsewhere he writes that there may be no consciousness of a decisive spiritual crisis, "as there may be in fact no such crisis."[2]

But to Wesley there was always a crisis, as was true in his experience, to which the conscience bore witness. With this writer, as with Wesley, this assurance is the testimony of a good conscience. Sheldon feels that Wesley gave too little space to his human testimony, thinking in reality that the spontaneous conviction which issues from living spiritual affections is as strong a proof of being a child of God as is the direct witness

1.Sheldon, Op, cit. 471.
2. Ibid, p. 369,70

of the Spirit. He would have us believe that this conviction might exist without the other. But with Wesley this would never be true. The two are always co-existent.

He also believed that Wesley's type of Witness, being the product of the definite testimony of the Holy Spirit, was sufficient to declare to one that he had passed through the spiritual crisis of conversion, but that the human conviction was far better for the normal religious life. "Wesley's description," he says,"of the Holy Spirit's agency, as consisting in the immediate production of a specific conviction, applies far better to a possible crisis or exceptional exigency in Christian experience than to assurance as a standing fact in a normal Christian life."[1]

3. Wesley is not very clear as to how the Holy Spirit witnesses to the soul, but he is definite as to the mode in which the human spirit testifies. "As to the witness of our spirit: The soul as initmately and evidently perceives when it loves, delights, and rejoices in God, as when it loves and delights in anyghing on earth. And it can no more doubt, whether it loves, delights and re-

1.Ibid, 473

joices or no, than whether it exists or no." If therefore this be just reasoning, "He that now loves God, that delights and rejoices in him with an humble joy, and holy delight, and an obedient love, is a child of God."[1] He rests upon the very fundamental structure of the human consciousness, its infallibility and unfailing power to interpret experience.

Something of the same argument, though less tangible, is used with reference to the work of the Holy Spirit. "The manner how the divine testimony is manifested to the heart, I do not take upon me to explain. Such knowledge is too wonderful and excellent for me: I cannot attain unto it.... As no one knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of the man that is in him so the manner of the things of God knoweth no one save the Spirit of God. But the fact we know; namely, that the Spirit of God does give a believer such a testimony of his adoption, that while it is present to the soul, he can no more doubt the reality of his sonship, than he can doubt of the shining of the sun,

1.Sermons, Vol. I, p. 88

while he stands in the full blaze of his beams".[1] This is the argument from experience, and while less certain of his grounds psychologically, he falls back on the reality of the testimony of the consciousness as to the validity of his spiritual experience, as he did for the conclusions of the human spirit.

4. As to the definite union of these two witnesses possibly the clearest conception of the Wesleyan position has been given by Curtis. "What takes place", he writes, "is essentially this: The moment the Holy Spirit begins the reorganization of a man he begins to help the person to recover the filial sense which man had lost in depravity. The person now loyal to Christ struggles toward the realization, but cannot fully achieve it, no not even in his loftiest mood. Then, there comes a crisis (not necessarily an external crisis) when with a deeper sense of need, or with a more thorough consecration, or with a greater purpose to serve men, the man opens himself entirely

1. Ibid, Vol. I, p.89

to the wish of the Holy Spirit. Into this new opportunity the Spirit rushes eagerly and completes the broken intuition; and now the self-conscious person has the glorious filial sense, and his home life in the family of God is as real to him as his peace in conscience."[1] Doubtless Wesley would accept this as the final witness.

These two, the human and the divine, form the joint witness whereby one possesses an undeniable assurance of personal salvation, or of a filial revelation with God.

As to the unity of these witnesses, Wesley says, "It is manifest, here are two witnesses mentioned, who together testify the same thing."[2] Another writes, "The word in the original evidently implies the sense which our translators follow... Summarturein signifies to be a fellow-witness, or to witness the same thing that another does; and so the word constantly signifies in Scripture, and is never used but where there is a concurrent evidence of two witnesses".[3]

1. Curtis, op. cit., p.389
2. Sermons, Vol. I, p.95
3. Sherlock, Works, Vol. I, pp. 154-55

W. Necessity and Possibility of the Witness of the Spirit.

1. In Wesley's thought it was necessary to have the witness of the Spirit in order that one might know of a certainty that he was a child of God. No other test existed for him which was more final than this one. He speaks of the conscience being deceived thus, "Discover thyself, thou poor self-deceiver! thou who art confident of being a child of God; thou who sayest, 'I have the witness in myself,' and therefore defiest all thy enemies.... Thou art now not lowly of heart; therefore thou hast not received the Spirit of Jesus unto this day....Thou dost not keep His commandments; therefore thou lovest Him not, neither art thou a partaker of the Holy Ghost. It is consequently as certain and as evident as the oracles of God can make it, His Spirit does not bear witness with thy spirit that thou art a child of God. O cry unto Him that the scales may fall off thine eyes; that thou mayest know thyself as thou art known

...till thou hear the voice that raises the dead, saying, 'Be of good cheer: thy sins are forgiven; thy faith hath made thee whole.'"[1]

Here we see Wesley thinks it is possible for one to be self-deceived when he relies upon his own conscience, and the only certain witness of filial relationship with God is that of the Holy Spirit which says, "Thy sins are forgiven". This may seem a contradiction, when formerly we asserted the reliability of the testimony of the consciousness. It is only his mode of impressing upon us the necessity of the added testimony of the Holy Spirit as to one's adoption into God's family.

2. For him there was no substitute for this witness of the Holy Spirit. It was absolutely necessary for one to possess this divine assurance that he was a Christian. Nothing else could take its place. Supposed fruits of the Spirit, the testimony of the mind, as noted above, the "inner illumination of intuition," before being authenticate, must bear the stamp of the Spirit's witness. On this score he was extremely explicit. Note the following, given at some length to bring out his

1.Sermons, Vol. I, 81

point:

"Let none rest in any supposed fruit of the Spirit without this witness. There may be foretasts of joy, of peace, of love, and those not delusive, but really from God, long before we have the witness in ourselves; before the Spirit of God witnesses with our spirits that we have 'redemption in the blood of Jesus, even the forgiveness of sins.' Yes, there may be a degree of longsuffering, of gentleness, of fidelity, meekness, temperance (not a shadow thereof, but a real degree, bu the preventing grace of God), before we 'are accepted in the Beloved,' and, consequently before we have a testimony of our acceptance: but it is by no means advisable to rest here; it is at the peril of our souls if we do. If we are wise, we shall be continually crying to God, until His Spirit cry in our heart, 'Abba, Father!' This is the privilege of all the children of God, and without this we can never be assured that we are His children. Without this we cannot retain a steady peace, nor avoid perplexing doubts and

fears. But when we have once received the Spirit of adoption, this 'peace which passeth all understanding'.... will 'keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.' And when this has brought forth its genuine fruits.....there is no need that we should ever more be deprived of either the testimony of God's Spirit, or the testimony of our own, the consciousness of walking in all righteousness and true holiness."[1]

Here he affirms that even though these fruits of the Spirit be genuine, before we have received the witness of the Spirit, it is at the peril of one's soul that he rest here. It is necessary to have the seal of the witness of the Spirit, that therefrom peace may be derived, and that he may never be deprived of it. The testimony of the conscience, fruits of the Spirit, or any other genuine evidences of being converted cannot be accepted as substitutes for the divine seal, the testimony of the Holy Spirit.

Tillett emphasized this thought when he writes,

1. Works, Vol. V. p.133

"Next to justification and regeneration, which together constitute the essence of salvation on the divine side, the witness of the Spirit is the most important element that enters into what we call 'experimental religion,' a term which Methodists may be said to have introduced into devotional and thological literature.... Wesley took up where Luther left off and Preached with an emphasis hitherto unknown that 'being justified by faith we have peace with God'... and that there can be no peace with God without a conscious assurance of pardon"[1] This is the contention of Wesley stated by a recent Methodist theologian.

3. Wesley taught that this divine witness of the Spirit was the privilege of all believers. As he held there was no substitute for this, and since it is necessary for one to have this assurance of salvation to be a child of God, naturally he would be forced to affirm that all believers may attain unto this certainty of divine witness. This affirmation included the idea that the witness

1.Tillett, Personal Salvation, 275

of the Spirit was a common privilege of all believers, and not one limited to a special class. In pointing out the difference between justifying faith and a sense of assurance or pardon, he writes, "By a sense of pardon I mean a distinct, explicit assurance that my are forgiven. I allow (1) that there there is an explicit assurance; (2) that it is the common privilege of all real Christians; (3) that it is the proper Christian faith which 'purifieth the heart' and 'overcometh the world'. But I cannot allow that justifying faith is such an assurance, or necessarily connected therewith."[1] As noted elsewhere he writes, "If we are wise we shall be continually crying to God, until His Spirit cry in our heart, 'Abba, Father!' This is the privilege of all the children of God, and without this we can never be assured that we are his children."[2]

Others might affirm that there was a better method by which assurance could be attained, but for Wesley this was the one way, the privilege

---

1. Works, Vol. XII, pp. 109,10.
2. Supra, p. 66

of all followers of Christ. One could expect this item in the theology of Wesley since he was a strict Arminian. It is coexistent with the idea of the universality of the atonement, and its benefits. Usually this doctrine is treated by Methodist theologians in connection with the benefits of the atonement, under the section on justification. The atonement, he said, was universal, and all its benefits naturally must likewise be universal. Since the witness of the Spirit is a benefit of the atonement, it follows that it is universal. No faithful follower of God is doomed to go without this evidence of his conversion.

Tillett, in pointing out the trend of the modern treatment of Wesley's doctrine, clearly doubts that this is a necessary privilege of all believers. While he may believe that this would be a privilege of believers, still as to its being a necessary privilege he would hesitate. "Can one be a regenerate believer and not have the witness of the Spirit? We answer: (1) It is

exceptional... for such to be the case; and perhaps it does not often occur that one becomes a truly regenerate believer and long continues such without the witness. (2) The Holy Spirit testifies 'with our spirit' and not independently of it.... (3) The Bible says.... that unless we are born again we cannot enter the kingdom of God, but it nowhere says that unless we have the witness of the Spirit convincing us of our regeneration we are therefore lost.... We believe that there are some sincere ....Christians who have perplexed themselves about their having or not having the witness of the Spirit, that it would give them absolute and positive comfort to be assured, that it is possible for one to be a sincere Christian and yet not have consciously the witness of the Spirit."[1]

Herein he states that there are many devout Christians who long for this witness, but do not possess it. Wesley would say that there might be some who, when first converted, did not immediately possess this witness; but as to devout, earnest

1.Sheldon, op, cit., p. 284-6.

Christians, of long standing, not possessing this divine assurance, he would say positively no. He writes, "None who believe the Scriptures to be the Word of God, can doubt the importance of such a truth as this: a truth revealed therein.... solemnly and of set purpose, as denoting one of the peculiar privileges of the children of God"[1]

4. The possibility of the divine witness of the Holy Spirit, Wesley said, is confirmed by the constant testimony of Christian experience. It is not only taught in the Bible, for none can doubt that this is the explicit meaning of Romans 8:16, were we read, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God;" but it is also the weight of Christian testimony. After all this appeal to experience was the keynote of Wesley's views. His work was builded upon this appeal to consciousness. His was a doctrine of knowledge, because he could say, "I know the Spirit witnesses". He writes:

1.Sermons, Vol. I, p. 93.

"And here properly comes in, to confirm this scriptural doctrine, the experience of the children of God; thousands of whom can declare, that they never did know themselves to be in the favor of God, till it was directly witnessed to them by his Spirit; but by all those who are convinced of sin, and who feel the wrath of God abiding on them. They cannot be satisfied by anything else than a direct testimony from his Spirit.... And which way can these souls be possibly comforted, but by a divine testimony (not that they are good, or sincere, or conformable to the Scripture in heart and life, but) that God justifieth the ungodly.....

"Everyone therefore who denies the existence of such a testimony does in effect deny justification by faith."[1]

This is Wesley's classical appeal to Christian testimony to verify the Witness of the Spirit, as taught by Paul. Not only does the testimony of Christians confirm it, but that of those who are not yet converted, who feel the need of grace, tells the same story. To deny it, he would have

1.Sermons, Vol. I, pp. 96,7.

us believe, is to deny the essential doctrine of the Bible, the keynote of the Reformation, justification by faith. Elsewhere he affirms, "So that there is no need that we should ever more be deprived of either the testimony of God's Spirit, or the testimony of our own, the consciousness of walking in all righteousness and true holiness"[1] This testimony remains so constant that one need never be deprived of it.

5. The reality of the experience of this testimony of the Spirit was never doubted by Wesley. He had longed for the peace which comes with the testimony while seeking to find Christ as his Savior. When he was converted he experienced the peace and joy of the divine assurance that he was a child of God. In all his writings he holds it up as a possibility, yes, a necessity. To him it was the center around which all Christian experience revolved. One has but to refer to his sermons, numbered X and XI on "The Witness of the Spirit" to verify the fact that Wesley did not at any time doubt the reality of this testimony.

1. Works, Vol. V. p. 133.

In one place he speaks of a period of twenty years having elapsed when he would not retract anything he had said concerning the witness of the Spirit. Note, "I observed many years ago, 'It is hard to find words in the language of men, to explain the deep things of God. Indeed there are none that will adequately express what the Spirit of God works in His children. But perhaps one might say... by the testimony of the Spirit, I mean, an inward impression on the soul, whereby the Spirit of God immediately and directly witnesses to my spirit, that I am a child of God'....

"After twenty years' further consideration, I see no cause to retract any part of this."

In his "Plain Account of Christian Perfection," which was written in 1766, he refers to those whom he met at Hernhut, who testified concerning the witness of the Spirit.[1] He also indicates in the same that he believes that the Spirit witnesses to one's sanctification.[2] He even goes so far as to declare that to deny this experience is to deny justification by faith.[3] Through the

1. Supra, p. 47.
2. Plain Account of Christian Perfection, p.287
3. Supra, p. 71

years of his long life this remains as the constant testimony that the Spirit of God can witness to the adoption of the regenerated into the kingdom of God.

6. The doctrine of Wesley at the hand of recent Methodist theologians has not been treated as well as formerly. Wesley's strong emphasis was on the divine element, while the present stress is more or less on the human phase. Sheldon, doubts the necessity of this divine witness, when he avows, "While then we do not deny that, in accommodation to some special demand of the religious experience, The Holy Spirit may operate immediately for producing the conviction of acceptance with God, we are persuaded that assurance as a standing fact in the normal Christian life rests principally on the mediate agency of the Spirit- on His efficiency in forming filial character and feeling. To sum all up in a sentence, assurance is in and through the filial consciousness, which consciousness is at once an activity of man's spirit and a product of the Holy Spirit agency."[1] This was written in 1903.

1. Sheldon, op.cit.,p.474

In a more recent work, written in 1922, on the point at issue he says that concomitant with regeneration is assurance, which is "a more or less luminous conviction of an individual that he stands before God as an accepted child."[1] Again, in referring to a possible direct witness of the Spirit, he writes "But ordinarily in this form it would not seem to be necessary. Living filial affections by their own virtue naturally evoke a spontaneous inference as to the relation of acceptance with God."[2] More to the point he writes, "One who has these affections need not wait for any mystic voice to assure him of his standing".[3] It is seen that in this he lacks the definiteness of Wesley's earlier statement of the distinct necessity of the believer possessing the witness of the Spirit as to his regeneration. He is doubtless writing under the influence of more recent trends which belittle the need of the supernatural working directly upon the soul, as in Wesley's day was the normal belief.

1. Sheldon, The Essentials of Christianity, p.226
2. Ibid, p. 228
3. Ibid, p. 228

VI. The Direct Witness of the Holy Spirit.

The witness of the Holy Spirit to one's adoption, according to Wesley, comes directly from the Holy Spirit to the human consciousness. It is not to be confused with any type of dynamic inspiration or infusion coming through the mind. It is not the same as "an inner illumination of the mind" whereby one knows his religious status. Nor is it an intuition arising from conscience or fruits of personal righteousness, whereby one thinks he is a child of God. While all of these may be worthy within themselves and true, still to Wesley they will not be accepted as substitutes for this direct testimony of the Holy Spirit. As to the manner of the coming of this witness, Wesley may remain in doubt, but as to the fact of its directness he does not waver.

(1) He gladly admits the witness of the human spirit, being nearly the testimony of conscience, as it is abetted by the fruits of the Spirit. In quoting Romans 8:16, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children

of God," he states, "It is manifest, here are two witnesses mentioned, who testify together the same thing; the Spirit of God, and our own spirit."[1] He would not have us believe that the divine witness is all there is, but he affirms that the witness coming from the Holy Spirit speaks directly to, and along with, this human spirit. It is not our purpose at this point to discuss the nature of this human witness, suffice it to say it finds its completion in the testimony coming from the divine Spirit.

(2) The Second witness received, the witness of the Spirit, he affirms to core immediate and direct. Speaking about the text, "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Gal. 4:6), he states "Is not this something immediate and direct, not the result of reflection or argumentation? Does not this Spirit cry, 'Abba, Father,' in our hearts the moment it is given, antecedently to any reflection upon our sincerity; yea to any reasoning whatsoever? ....All these texts then, in their obvious meaning, describe a direct testimony of the Spirit."[2]

1. Sermons, Vol. 1,35
2. Ibid, I,p.35

Again on this score he writes, "The sum of all is this: the testimony of the Spirit is an inward impression on the soul of believers, whereby the Spirit of God directly testifies to their spirit, that they are the children of God. And it is not questioned, whether there is a testimony of the Spirit; but whether there is any direct testimony? Whether there is any other than that which arises from a consciousness of the fruit of the Spirit? We believe there is; because this is the plain, natural meaning of the text, illustrated by the preceding words, and by the parallel passage in the epistle to the Galatians; because, in the nature of things, the testimony must precede the fruit which springs from it; and because this plain meaning of the Word of God is confirmed by the experience of innumerable children of God; yea, and by the experience of all who are convinced of sin, who can never rest till they have a direct witness".[1]

Whereby we see that the witness of the Holy Spirit cannot be merged into the testimony of our <u>own spirit.</u> Thus we should have only one wit-

1.Ibid, I,p. 99

ness and one testimony instead of two distinct testimonies.

2. Moreover, the testimony of the Holy Spirit precedes the testimony of the human spirit. Wesley is very distinct on this point. To him the Spirit witnesses to one's adoption before any fruits of the Spirit can be said to exist. It is the basis of a life of righteousness. Let him speak on this issue: "That the testimony of the Spirit of God, must, in the very nature of things be antecedent to the testimony of our own spirit, may appear from this single consideration; We must be holy in heart and life, before we can be conscious that we are so. But we must love God, before we can be holy at all, this being the root of Holiness. Now we cannot love God, till we know He loves us: 'We love him because he first loved us;' and we cannot know His love to us, till His Spirit witnesses to our spirit. Till then we cannot believe it.... Since therefore the testimony of his Spirit must precede the love

of God, and all holiness, of consequence it must precede our consciousness thereof."[1]

Wesley raised this question in order to carry his point of the direct witness of the Spirit, as distinct from the human spirit. If both witnesses came together then there was no argument on which he could rest his views that the witness of the Spirit was direct, and distinct. Otherwise there would be one united witness, which could be thought of as coming only from the human spirit, or the conscience. Thus the divine element in this witness to personal salvation would be eliminated. While Wesley is a firm believer in the testimony of the conscience as derived from the fruits of the Spirit, still he is unwilling to have anything overshadow the divine, direct, and supernatural element in one's assurance of salvation. By keeping these two distinct, through showing that the divine witness antedates the other, he is able to maintain the supernatural process.

1. Ibid, I, 95,6

3. The fact that this witness to sonship is direct is also confirmed by human experience. As noted elsewhere human testimony confirms the existence of the witness, but Wesley goes farther and affirms that this direct witness of the Spirit is so authenticated. "It is confirmed by your experience and mine. The Spirit itself bore witness to my spirit, that I was a child of God, gave me an evidence thereof, and I immediately cried, 'Abba, Father'. And this I did before I reflected on, or was conscious of any fruit of the Spirit". This needs no further comment than is given above, where the argument for the confirmation of the existence of the witness of the Spirit is found. For every step in his argument, Wesley was careful to have experience with him. It became the test of each element in his doctrinal structure.

4. The direct testimony is to be sought by the sinner that he might have peace from the turbulency of his heart. Sin, Wesley thought, brought unrest, the stress of temptation and evil. Every awakened sinner is in a state of uneasiness until the wit-

ness of the Spirit comes directly to his soul that he has been accepted by God as His child,and that his sins are "covered by the blood of Christ". The sinner cannot be satisfied with anything less than this immediate witness or persuasion of assurance, born of the testimony of the Holy Spirit. A quotation on this will suffice to show the strength of this argument:

"These", speaking of sinners,"cannot be satisfied with anything less than a direct testimony from His Spirit, that He is 'merciful to their unrighteousness, and remembers their sins and iniquities no more.' Tell any of these, 'You are to know you are a child, by reflection on what He has wrought in you, on your love, joy and peace;' and will he not immediately reply, 'By all this I know I am a child of the devil."[1] Again he makes the same assertion that the sinner cannot rest until he has the direct witness, and can know that his sins are forgiven.[2]

1.Sermons, I, p.98
2. Ibid, I,99

The force of this argument is that since even the aroused and convicted sinner cannot rest until the Spirit directly witnesses that he is forgiven, therefore in the nature of things this direct witness from the Spirit must be a possibility. Throughout Wesley is trying to establish the one thought: That the assurance of salvation comes through a direct witness of the Holy Spirit to our spirit. If he can lay a foundation for this, then his doctrine is trustworthy.

5. In Wesley's desire to place the doctrine of the direct witness of the Spirit as an integral part of Arminian theology he tries to establish the idea that to deny this witness is to deny the heart of evangelical belief, and more especially of Arminianism, Justification by faith. Wesley states that this witness of the Spirit and and justification by faith stand or fall together. He writes: "Everyone therefore who denies the existence of such a testimony in effect denies justification by faith. It follows that either he never experienced this, either he never was

justified, or that he has forgotten.... the experience he then had himself; the manner wherein God wrought in his soul, when his former sins were blotted out."[1]

This again is an appeal to his own personal experience. He means to say, that when he was converted, he experienced this witness, hence every one should possess it, when God justified him. If Wesley's position be correct that the witness of the Spirit is both possible and necessary, and a benefit of the atonement, it would follow that to deny it was to deny justification by faith. Since he carefully laid his premises, and diligently employed strict logic in his arguments, he declared that his conclusion was correct. Therefore justification by faith realized in the soul, and the witness of the Spirit, must coexist.

VII. The Relationship of the Direct and Indirect Witnesses to Assurance.

1. This direct witness does not stand alone; but from it comes an indirect one. The direct testimony of the Spirit is given to the witness of the soul. The Spirit concurrently testifies with, or as Wesley would say, to, the human spirit that

1. Ibid, I, p.97

we are children of God. One does not stand by itself in its affirmation of assurance of redemption. At the expense of a possible repetition of material let us quote Wesley at this point:

"The sum of all is this: the testimony of the Spirit is an inward impression on the souls of believers, whereby the Spirit of God directly testifies to their spirit, that they are the children of God. And it is not questioned whether there is a testimony of the Spirit; but whether there is any direct testimony? Whether there is any other than that which arises from a consciousness of the fruit of the Spirit. We believe there is; because this is the plain meaning of the text... because in the nature of the thing the testimony must precede the fruit which springs from it."[1]

Wesley terms this the "testimony of the conscience". The Spirit testifies to the conscience, or along with the conscience, and this united witness is the basis of assurance of forgiveness and sonship. The two cannot be separated in the

1.Sermons, Vol. I. p.99

thinking of Wesley. First the Spirit witness and the fruits of the Spirit, or the voice of conscience, unites with this divine affirmation. The order of precedence as noted elsewhere is the witness of the Spirit always first, and followed by the other.

2. These two witnesses can by no juggling of words be made to refer to the same thing. They are distinct in their source. The first is from the Holy Spirit, while the second is from the human spirit, consciousness or the conscience. They are distinct in that which prompts their their witness. The first is based upon the fact that one has been adopted into God's family as a child (Rom. 8:16), and the second is the result of a "conscience void of offence," of of the fact that one possesses the fruits of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, etc. While they both affirm the same thing, still Wesley would have us believe that the final testimony is the result of two distinct, inseparable forces, divine and human. He states the doctrine thus:

" 'But direct witness is never referred to in the Book of God.' Not as standing alone; not as a single witness; but as connected with the other; as giving a joint testimony; testifying with our spirit that we are the children of God.'"[1] Again, "The preposition (speaking with reference to Rom.8:16) only denotes that He witnesses this, at the same time that He enables us to cry, 'Abba, Father'. But I contend not; seeing so many other texts, with the experience of real Christians, sufficiently evince that there is in every believer both the testimony of God's Spirit and the testimony of his own, that he is a child of God."[2]

1.Ibid, p. 98
2. Works, Vol. V.p.113

VIII. The Witness of the Human Spirit.

We turn from a discussion of the witness of the Holy Spirit to that of the human spirit. For Wesley, each was as important as the other, though in origin the precedence must be given to the former. The two verified each other, and neither could exist without the other, except when one was first converted, and the testimony of the conscience as to the existence of the fruit of the Spirit had not yet been given. The Spirit witnessed to the filial relationship with God, the conscience confirmed it, and the resultant testimony as a joint witness was conclusive.

1. As we have noted in our previous discussion Wesley affirmed that a human witness of this relationship with God was possible. From various passages in the New Testament he develops his view as to the marks of a Christian. He reasons that when one has these traits of character he is a Christian. This reasoning process, with the con-

clusion attained, is the testimony of the human spirit that one's sins are forgiven. It is the voice of conscience concluding that one possesses those essential characteristics of the sons of God. This is an appeal to human experience, based upon the reliability of the reasoning powers of the mind, or on the reliability of the testimony of the consciousness.

John states this doctrine in these words, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" (I Jno. 3:14), and "Hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him" (1Jno. 3:19). The text for Wesley's sermon on "The Witness of Our Own Spirit" bears the words, "the testimony of our conscience". Commenting upon such evidence and the testimony of the consciousness he says, "Notwithstanding which, it is evident, both the apostle himself and all these pillars in God's temple, were very far from despising these marks of their being the children of God; and that they applied

them to their own souls for the confirmation of their faith. Yet all this is no other than rational evidence, the witness of our own spirit, our reason or understanding. It all resolves into this: those that have these marks are the children of God; but we have these marks: therefore we are the children of God".[1]

2. Wesley makes the conscience the source of this human testimony. He constantly appeals to the consciousness of possessing the fruits of righteousness of knowing that one lives justly and serves the Lord. He affirms that the true seal of the witness of the Holy Spirit is this testimony of one's mind that he lives as the Bible indicates a child of God should. With reference to this appeal to experience he states:

"And with regard to the outward marks of the children of God,...you undoubtedly know in your own breast, if, by the grace of God, it belongs to you. Your conscience informs you from day to day if you do not take the name of God within your lips,

1.Sermons, Vol. I,p.86,87

unless with seriousness and devotion, with reverence and glodly fear....if you honor your father and mother; if you do to all as you would they should do to you, and if, whether you eat or drink, you are temperate therein, and do all to the glory of God"[1]

Again he says, "Neither is it questioned whether there is an indirect witness or testimony that we are the children of God. This is nearly, if not exactly, the testimony of a good conscience toward God; and is the result of reason or reflection on what we feel in our own souls. Strictly speaking, it is a conclusion partly drawn from the Word of God and partly from our own experience. The Word of God says, everyone who has the fruit of the Spirit is a child of God; experience, or inward consciousness, tells me that I have the fruit of the Spirit; hence I naturally conclude, 'Therefore I am a child of God"[2]

We note here that this human witness is the testimony of the conscience, and also the conscious-

1.Sermons, Vol.I,p.87
2.Works, Vol. V.p.125
2.

ness of having the fruits of the Spirit. It is also a reasoning from the Bible as to whether or not our lives are conformed to its standards.

3. He goes one step farther in defining his doctrine to affirm that the human consciousness, attested by the conscience, stands as the arbiter of our filial relationship with God. This consciousness of possessing the fruits of the Spirit, from which springs the testimony of the conscience, has the final seal to place upon our assurance of salvation. He says, "Now this is properly the testimony of our own spirit; even the testimony of our own conscience, that God hath given us to be holy of heart, and holy in outward conversation. It is the consciousness of having received, in and by the Spirit of adoption, the tempers mentioned in the Word of God, as belonging to His adopted children... a consciousness that we are inwardly conformed by the Spirit of God, to the image of His Son, and that we walk in justice, mercy, and truth, doing the things which are pleasing in his sight"[1]

1. Sermons, Vol. I, p.87

When consciousness avows that one is a child of God, its affirmation is as valid as when it testifies to other facts of experience. The Spirit speaks to the mind, the consciousness, and this same consciousness, in appraising the life by the standards of God's Word, says that the life is upright and holy. Then one is assured with a knowledge which is both divine and human that he is a child of God. This is the final test of assurance of personal redemption. His was a doctrine of personal experience. In appealing to consciousness, it was his own consciousness which became the final verification of that doctrine which he found in the Bible.

IX. The Joint Testimony of the Holy Spirit and the Human Spirit.

1. The testimony of the Holy Spirit and of the human spirit finally unite to form one joint witness of adoption. Sufficient has been said to make clear Wesley's position on the distinctive

ness of these two witnesses, that we cannot accuse him now of losing their identity in order to form a united or joint single assurance. In writing of these two witnesses standing together he says, "Not as standing alone; not as a single witness; but as connected with the other; as giving joint testimony; testifying with our spirit that we are children of God."[1]

It is this final joint testimony which is the climax of Wesley's doctrine. Others have affirmed the existence of the single testimony of the Holy Spirit, or of the human spirit, but Wesley made his greatest contribution of the doctrine of assurance by affirming the fact of the joint testimony of the two witnesses to adoption. Luther's doctrine, it is to be remembered, was characterized by its subjective element, which if refined would be Wesley's witness of the Holy Spirit. But nowhere does he affirm the joint testimony of these two elements.

2. As to the nature of this joint testimony Wesley knew that it consisted in a single, uniform, definite assurance of redemption.

1. Sermons, Vol. V, p.131

He felt that the divine Spirit operated on the human mind, or consciousness, and through these combined forces assurance resulted.

3. This final, united testimony becomes conclusive as to one's sonship. The testimony of the Holy Spirit is added to that of the human spirit, uniting in a luminous assurance of the entire consciousness that "I, even I, am reconciled to God." This is brought out from his definition of the witness of the Spirit. Speaking of the human spirit through consciousness being certain that one bears the marks of the sons of God, he asks, "What is that testimony of God's Spirit, which is superadded to and conjoined with this?...an inward impression on the soul....that I am a child of God; that Jesus Christ hath loved me, and given Himself for me; and that all my sins are blotted out, and I, even I, am reconciled to God."[1] "Should it still be inquired, How does the Spirit of God 'bear witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God,' so as to exclude all doubt,

---

1.Sermons, Vol. I,p.87

and evince the reality of our sonship,- the answer is clear from what has been observed above.... Then a Christian can in no wise doubt of his being a child of God."[1]

When this joint testimony is experienced one need never doubt the reality of his filial relationship with the Father Almighty. This is the climax of Wesley's appeal, not only to the Bible, but to consciousness, and conscience, as the evidence of regeneration and sanctification.

4. This joint testimony can be, and is to be, verified by the fruits of the Spirit. He affirms that the witness of the human spirit is the voice of conscience, or the testimony of the consciousness of possessing the marks of the sons of God, and then he reasons that the joint testimony may be verified by the fruits of the Spirit.

He writes, "We assert.... that the fruit of the Spirit, immediately springs from this testimony, not always in the same degree, even when the testimony is first given, and much less afterward"[2]

1.Ibid, Vol. I,p.88
2.Works, Vol. V.p.125

When one has the unitary witness of the two testimonies and then finds love, joy, peace, brotherly love, patience, forgiveness, mercy longsuffering, a love for the house of God, and for the service of the Lord, then he believes that this joint witness to sonship is verified unmistakably. He affirms that the joint witness and the fruits of the Spirit are correlative. One cannot exist without the other. They are mutually dependent, for one without the other is invalid. Let him speak: "Two inferences may be drawn from the whole: the first, let none ever presume to rest in any supposed testimony of the Spirit, which is separate from the fruit of it....The second inference is, let none rest in any supposed fruit of the Spirit without the witness."[1]

This experience is ever-abiding, so long as one maintains his status before God as his son. "So that there is no need that we should ever more be deprived of either the testimony of God's Spirit or the testimony of our own."[2]

1.Sermons, Vol. I,p.100
2.Supra, p.37

With these words he closes his final sermon on "The Witness of the Spirit" which is dated April 4, 1767.

X. The Sum of Wesley's Doctrine of the Witness of the Spirit.

The doctrine in essence is this: Every child of God possesses the witness of the Holy Spirit and of his own spirit that he is adopted into the Family of God. The conscience forms the true witness of the human spirit, whose testimony arises from the consciousness of exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit in one's life. These two, the divine and the human, form a joint witness, whose unitary assurance Paul describes as "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God". "While this joint testimony may vary in intensity and clarity, still it is ever-abiding, so long as one maintains his sonship relation with God".

This was the heart of Wesley's Theology, and the keynote of his doctrinal position. He tested every system by this dogma. If there was a place for the personal witness of the Holy Spirit then he accepted

With these words he closes his final sermon on "The Witness of the Spirit" which is dated April -, 1767.

X. The Sum of Wesley's Doctrine of the Witness of the Spirit.

The doctrine in essence is this: Every child of God possesses the witness of the Holy Spirit and of his own spirit that he is adopted into the Family of God. The conscience forms the true witness of the human spirit, whose testimony arises from the consciousness of exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit in one's life. These two, the divine and the human, form a joint witness, whose unitary assurance Paul describes as "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God". While this joint testimony may vary in intensity and clarity, still it is ever-abiding, so long as one maintains his sonship relation with God".

This was the heart of Wesley's Theology, and the keynote of his doctrinal position. He tested every system by this dogma. If there was a place for the personal witness of the Holy Spirit then he accepted

the doctrine, otherwise it was rejected.

XI. The Meaning of this Doctrine for Wesleyan Theology.

The Wesleyan movement is referred to as "the evangelical revival," and such in truth it was. Wesley's activity gave birth not to a doctrinal organization, nor to a creed; but the vital interest of Wesleyan workers was in evangelism.

But it was this doctrine of the witness of the Spirit which made evangelism possible. Those early Methodist preachers exhorted their penitents to seek the Lord until the Spirit witnessed. They knew they were "saved" only when they possessed this witness of God's and the human spirit. The zeal of Methodism was enhanced by this doctrine. All those movements which are Wesleyan in origin, such as Methodism, the Evangelical church organized by Albright, and the United Bretheren church, as founded by Otterbein, and the Free Methodists and others owe their existence and their peculiar emphasis upon "experimental religion" to this one doctrine of Wesley. This is their shaping and molding dogma. Wesleyanism ceases to be such when this doctrine is not made prominent.

DATA USED

1. Three classes of primary source materials were used.[1]

(1) The first class, and the essential one, consists of the writings of John Wesley. These are usually found as Sermons, Journal, Notes and Works. The Sermons have been published through various editions, as is true of his Journal. Wesley himself collected thirty-two volumes of his sermons, journal, notes, etc., and published them in Bristol between 1771 and 1774. In 1775 Wesley published his Notes on the New Testament, which were largely drawn from Bengel's "Gnomon of the New Testament. While this added nothing new to the field of New Testament scholarship, still it made current among Methodists the ripe fruitage of one of the world's greatest Greek scholars. Fifty-eight sermons were collected and published by Wesley in his lifetime. After his death the number of sermons, collected from

---

1. See Bibliography for titles.

his other writings, was raised to one hundred and forty. The first fifty-eight sermons were published by Wesley in the Arminian Magazine; later he revised them and published them in four volumes in 1788. These along with his Notes formed the standard of Wesley's doctrine, and in the trust deeds of the Methodist chapels reference is made to them as such.

(2) A second source of this primary material consists of the writings of Methodist theologians, throwing light upon Wesley's doctrine by means of their analyses. Among these are found the representatives of Wesleyan theology of each age. The line starts with Watson, Methodism's first great systematic theologian, and includes such as Wakefield, Raymond and Lee, Pope and Miley, Sheldon and Curtis, and more recent writers such as Tillett and Lewis.

(3) A third source of primary material is made up of the works of these writers, which we study as forming the background of the doctrine of Wesley. We have gone directly to the sources

of Wesley's doctrine and have tried to lay bare those elements which each has contributed to his views. For this reason such material is included in the primary list.

2. The secondary source material is composed of three divisions.[1]

(1) The first includes the histories of doctrine, where light is thrown upon the development of dogmatics through the years. By means of such Wesley's place in the history of theology is located.

(2) Theological encyclopedias have been consulted liberally with reference to works on the subject, men and their writings etc. For this reason they are included in the secondary sources.

(3) The final secondary source consists of general works consulted upon various items discussed in the body of the Thesis.

The Bibliography representing these source materials includes only those works which have been quoted or directly employed in the writing.

1. See Bibliography for titles.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I. PRIMARY SOURCES

1. Wesley's Works:

Wesley, John, Journals, 20 Parts, London, 1740-89
Journals, 2 Vols., New York, 1919-11
Notes on the New Testament, Bristol, 1775.
Plain Account of Christian Perfection, Bristol, 1766.
Sermons, Edition of Waugh and Mason, N.Y. 1831
Works, 8 Vols, New York 1896

Wesley, John and Charles, Poetical Works, 13 Vols., Edited by James H. Potts, N.Y. 1891.

Wesley, John, Living Thoghts of John Wesley, Edited by James H. Potts, New York. 1891.

2. Works by Methodist Theologians:

Banks, John S., A Manual of Christian Theology, London 1895
Curtis, O. A. The Christian Faith, New York, 1905
Lee, Luther, Elements of Theology, Syracuse, 1888
Miley, John, Systematic Theology, N.Y. 1892.
Pope, W.B., A Compendium of Christian Theology London, 1881
Sheldon, Henry Clay, Essentials of Christianity New York, 1922..
New Testament Theology N.Y.
Tillett, Wilbur, A Statement of the Faith of World-Wide Methodists, Nashville, 1903
Watson, Richard, Theological Institutes, New York, 1850.
Wakefield, Samuel, Christian Theology, New York, 1869.

3. Primary Sources excluding above Works:

Calvin, John, Commentary on the Epistles to the Romans, Tr. by Francis Sibon, London, 1843.
Jones, Rufus, Social Law in the Spiritual World, New York, 1909.
Nichols, James, Works of James Arminius, London, 1828.
Schaff, Philip, Creeds of Christendom, N.Y.1878,(All creeds cited in the thesis

appear herein).

II. Secondary SOURCES.

1. Histories of Christian Doctrine.

Dorner, J.A., History of Christian Doctrine, Edinburgh, 1871
Fisher, George P., History of Christian Doctrine, New York, 1896.
Harnack, Adolf, History of Dogma, (Tr. Neil Buchanan) New York, 1896-1902.
Neander, Augustus, History of Christian Dogmas, (Tr. J.E Ryland), London 1882.
Sheldon, William, A History of Christian Doctrine, New Yor, 1886.

2. Theological Encyclopedias:

Hastings, Jas., Editory, Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, New York, 1926.
Schaff, Philip, Theological Propaedeutic, New York, 1902.

3. General Secondary Sources:

Fritchett, W.H., Wesley and His Century London, 1906.
Moeler, J.A.Symbolik, Mayence, 1832.
Whitehead, John, The Life of the Rev. John Wesley, Philadelphia, 1845.

BOSTON UNIVERSITY
1 1719 02555 7945